



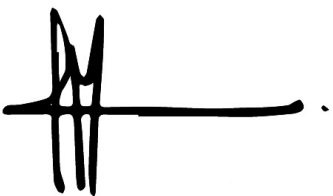
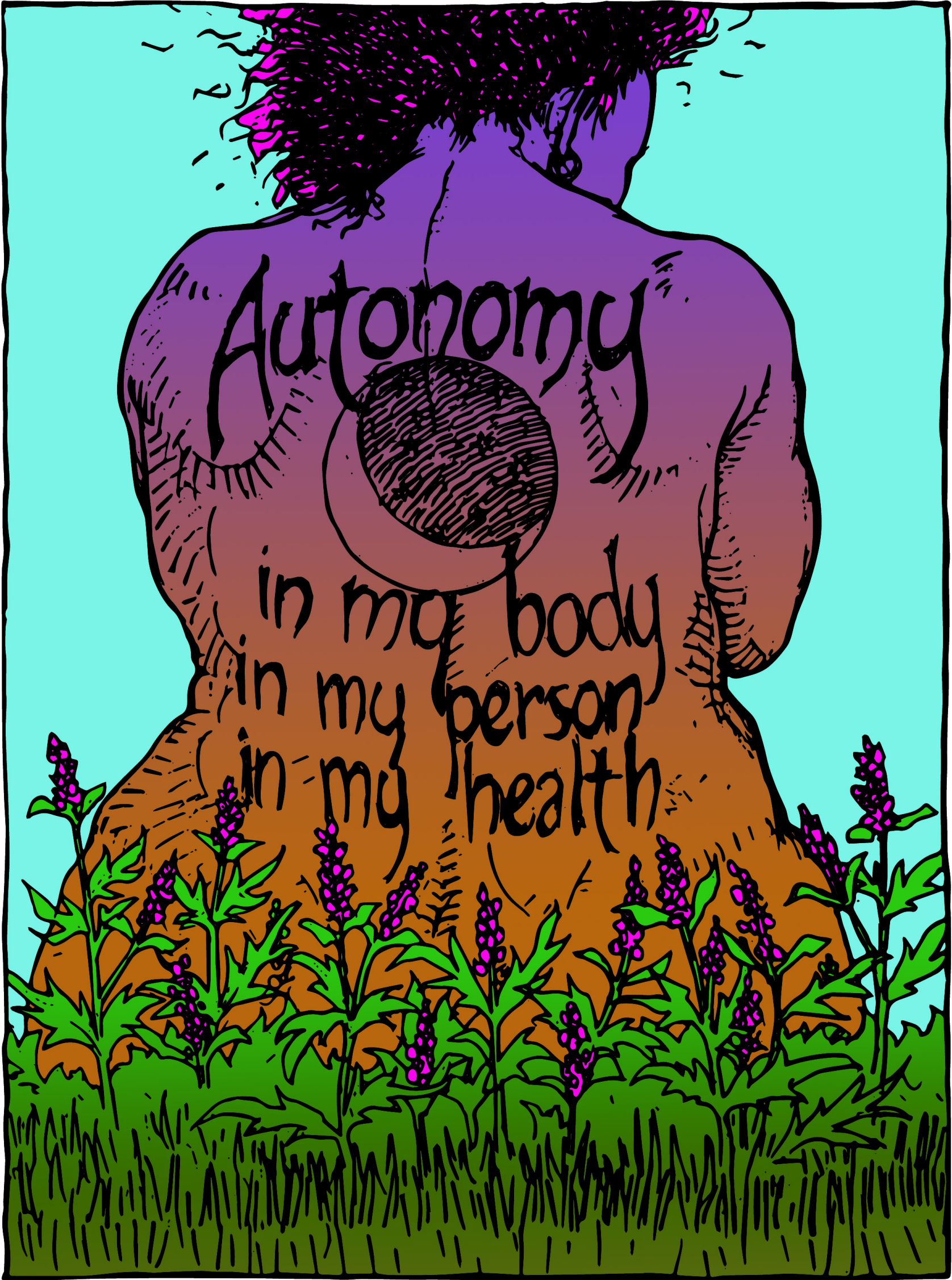
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STREET



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EMBRACING HUMANITY IN OUR APPROACH TO STUDYING HOMELESSNESS

CLAUDINE SIPILI

As a board member of the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI) Lived Expertise Advisory Board that played a major role in the design and implementation of the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness, my participation on the project was deeply influenced by my personal experience of homelessness. Having faced the challenges and uncertainties associated with housing instability firsthand, I have dedicated myself to making a positive impact and working towards finding lasting solutions for those facing similar struggles.

Our board members invested time and effort in preparing for this crucial study. It was important to us that the study go beyond the standard point-in-time homeless counts conducted by cities and counties for federal funding. Instead, we aimed to delve deeper into the human aspect of homelessness and understand the systemic failures that lead individuals to fall into homelessness in the first place.

One key distinction of this study is the concerted effort to include the voices of those who have experienced homelessness. It was imperative to us that the study was conducted with the utmost dignity and respect for the participants. Guided by my own experiences, I helped train the researchers on how to approach data collection with conversational graces, making the participants feel comfortable and valued throughout the process.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on humanizing the issue of homelessness. By collecting data from 3,198 questionnaires and conducting 365 in-depth interviews, we gained a deeper understanding of the individual stories and struggles of those experiencing homelessness. These narratives were then tied back to the systemic factors and failures that contribute to homelessness, providing a holistic view of the issue.

One of the most validating findings was that 90% of participants were housed in California before becoming homeless, with 75% experiencing homelessness in the same county where they were once housed. This finding underscored the need to address local and regional factors contributing to homelessness, dispelling the misconception that homelessness is solely a result of personal choices or that those who are homeless in our state are not really Californians.

Throughout the study, the board members' guidance helped create a safe and dignified space for survey participants to share their experiences openly. By involving individuals with lived experience, we gained deeper insights into the

complexities of homelessness and were able to challenge prevalent misconceptions surrounding the issue.

It is my hope that this study will foster empathy and understanding among those who have never experienced homelessness. All too often, blame is unfairly assigned to individuals, disregarding the systemic challenges they face. By humanizing the data and showcasing the stories behind the statistics, we aim to encourage a more compassionate approach to addressing homelessness.

People who have been marginalized and deprived of basic services often feel invisible to society. Proximate leaders, those with lived expertise, have a unique ability to fully see and understand the individuals they serve. They recognize that everyone possesses unique gifts and assets, and through their intimate knowledge of their communities, they can find innovative ways to connect people and address their needs.

As a board member with lived expertise, I firmly believe that people like me can play a pivotal role in understanding the complexities of homelessness. By inviting individuals with lived expertise to the table, we can evaluate existing systems of care and work towards meaningful recommendations to improve them.

My personal journey through homelessness has driven my passion for change. I am committed to advocating, volunteering and supporting organizations that strive to end homelessness. Everyone deserves a safe and stable place to call home, and I am determined to contribute to that cause in any way I can.

From my perspective, CASPEH has been an endeavor to humanize homelessness and understand its root causes. With input from board members like myself, who have experienced homelessness firsthand, we created a safe and respectful environment for participants to share their stories. By shedding light on the human aspect of homelessness and challenging misconceptions, we hope to inspire positive change in the broader systems serving those who are unhoused. Embracing humanity in our approach is key to finding lasting solutions for homelessness and fostering a society where everyone is seen, understood and supported.

Claudine Sipili is the Northern California Board Co-Chair for the BHHI Lived Expertise Advisory Board.

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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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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!

THE FUTURE STARTS NOW

When Mayor London Breed submitted her budget to the Board of Supervisors on June 1, it had many problematic elements, but one in particular stood out for the Coalition on Homelessness: The mayor’s plan would raid \$60 million from youth and family housing to pay for short-term housing, subsidies, shelter and other temporary funds for adults.

While visiting a tiny home site, Mayor Breed announced her plan that she wanted to fund shelter beds for unhoused San Franciscans. What she did not mention was the source of that funding and that these are already existing and replacement beds for closing shelter sites. All told, the mayor’s plan would result in a net loss of 80 beds. What we quickly discovered was that the Mayor was proposing to use \$40 million in existing Proposition C funds to be taken out of the housing category for youth and families, and \$20 million in future Prop. C revenue meant for transitional aged youth (TAY) and families housing for the next two years. There was no permanent funding source secured for those adult shelter beds and subsidies. For a point of reference, every \$20 million cut is equivalent to losing over 650 permanent housing slots for families and youth.

Voters passed Prop. C in November 2018, but corporate and anti-tax groups held it up in court for two years. Prop. C generates approximately \$300 million per year, and half the funds must go to housing and another quarter to behavioral health. Of the housing funds, the intention was to ensure families and youth experiencing homelessness are no longer ignored, so 20% of the housing funds are allocated to youth and 25% to homeless families. The total annual funds set aside for housing for these populations is roughly \$67 million combined.

The fund is overseen by the Our City Our Home Oversight Committee in the Controller’s Office. But the Mayor’s office never presented the plans to gut family and TAY housing funds to that oversight body.

“The Mayor of San Francisco can and should fund all of these items without pitting homeless children and youth against homeless adults,” said Miguel Carrera, a formerly homeless community organizer at the Coalition on Homelessness. “The city has a \$14 billion dollar budget. \$40 million is a fraction of that budget. The budget priorities are inequitable when the Mayor finds funding for a \$170 million wage raise to police, but for homeless adults chooses to take this considerably smaller amount of funding from children.”

The mayor justified appropriating Prop. C funds by saying that state funds from Project Homekey could make up the difference. However, the investment plan for housing already considered that funding would be matched by Homekey, and single adult housing was also matched by Homekey, not replaced. Prop. C was never meant to provide comprehensive funds necessary to address homelessness, but was meant to leverage needed state, federal and local funds.

“We need support for many people who need decent and permanent housing,” said Leticia Grijalva, a formerly homeless mother. “We don’t want to be a public charge but sometimes the need is great. Having support from our government is our last hope. Many of our children have to watch their parents struggle to keep them in housing, many times making them think of quitting school to support their family.”

Jennifer Friedenbach—the Prop. C, Our City Our Home campaign director who is also executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness,—added that Prop. C was designed to address such inequities. “We cannot solve homelessness if they continue to force poor families and youth to experience homelessness—the City must target our investments to prevent homelessness today and in the future,” she said.

Last year, just one provider, Compass Family Services, had requests for shelter from 6,000 different family members in San Francisco, the most

for family shelters. Only 14% of the city’s homeless housing units are for families with children. At the same time, on any given night in San Francisco, over 1,100 youth are experiencing homelessness. Over 50% of both youth and families are African American. Most currently homeless people in San Francisco first experienced homelessness as a child or a youth.

As soon as this proposal came to light, community members instantly went to work fighting back. They included families and youth who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, along with service providers and other concerned community leaders. The Coalition on Homelessness led the way by turning out folks to hearings, organizing a walk in City Hall corridors to visit policy makers, and reaching out to the media. The Our City Our Home oversight body held an emergency meeting and voted unanimously against the proposal. Two members of that body—Friedenbach and Chair Shanell Williams—along with family and youth advocates—met with the Controller’s Office, Supervisor Hillary Ronen’s office and high-ranking Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing staff to craft a plan.

From the community’s perspective, they wanted to come up with a proposal that would protect the youth and family housing, while funding shelter, housing and prevention for single adults. They resisted the move to pit these two communities against each other. In the end, creative solutions coming from the community, including from the Coalition on Homelessness, prevailed. The plan used interest garnered in the Prop. C fund going back since 2018 and two years forward which allowed it to cover the substantive proposals coming from the mayor’s office. At the same time, the housing for transitional aged youth and families was preserved. This proposal went to the Board of Supervisors on July 18 and passed unanimously.

In the end, this experience demonstrates what the Coalition on

Homelessness has known all along:— By working together, we can solve homelessness and protect the progress we have made to date. When the issue isn’t being used as political fodder, or when unhoused people aren’t being used as political scapegoats, homeless people and their allies can find solutions that work. Prop. C is an example of such solutions. Since this funding was preserved, two more youth housing buildings in South of Market with 63 units between them were approved by the Board of Supervisors despite strong opposition from neighbors surrounding the proposed project. Next year, the funding will achieve a substantial increase in the number of housing slots—bringing on 4,453 permanent housing subsidies or units, 400 new treatment beds and coordinated case management for about 5,500 people with serious mental health or addiction disorders, 746 new shelter beds, and new homeless prevention services for 4,425 households.

This was made possible when the community—homeless people themselves along with homeless service providers, business groups, religious groups, and civic groups—designed and carried out this voter initiative. Even more hard work ensued for the City and providers to carry out these plans.

The initiative is getting attacked from all sides, mostly for political or financial gain. The reality is, without Prop. C, San Francisco would have a massive increase in the homeless population. With rising rents up and down the West Coast come high rates of homelessness—and that is hard to address without funding to cover the difference between incomes and rent. The worst thing the City can do is drive homelessness even higher by continuing to underserve and ignore homeless children and youth, who will become chronically homeless adults without intervention. San Francisco has a lot more work to do, and working together, we can move the dial on homelessness by fighting for more state, local and federal funding to address the issue.

CONTRIBUTE TO STREET SHEET

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!

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.

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WOMEN RECYCLE BUILD HOPE AND DE

They haul many kilos of recyclable materials on their backs but receive little in return. These Bolivian women who help clean up the environment from dawn to dusk are fighting for recognition of their work and social and labour rights. They have come together in an association

By Franz Chávez, from the International

They haul many kilos of recyclable materials on their backs but receive little in return. These Bolivian women who help clean up the environment from dawn to dusk are fighting for recognition of their work and social and labour rights.

The inhabitants of La Paz, Bolivia's political centre, walk hurriedly and almost oblivious to the women of different ages silently opening heavy lids of municipal garbage dumpsters that are taller than the women themselves.

They use a homemade tool, a kind of hook with a long wooden handle, to dig through the unsorted waste, trying to avoid getting cut by broken glass, and in search of plastic containers, paper, cardboard or aluminium cans.

People walk by on the avenues and squares without looking at them, and sometimes actively avoiding them. The recyclers feel this indifference and even rejection, but they overcome it with the courage gained over years and generations, convincing themselves that they have a dignified vocation.

"People call us dirty pigs (cochinas), they humiliate us and we can never respond," says Rosario Ramos, a 16-year-old who accompanies her mother, Valeriana Chacolla, 58, sorting through the trash for recyclable waste.

A study by the United Nations Joint

Program on self-employed women workers in the country describes them generally as being "of indigenous origin, adults with primary school education. 70 per cent of them are also involved in activities related to commerce, while 16 per cent work in the manufacturing industry."

Of a population of 12.2 million projected by the National Institute of Statistics for the year 2022, 5.9 million are women. La Paz is home to 1.53 million people.

Of the total population of this Andean country, 41 per cent defined themselves as indigenous in the last census, while according to the latest official data available, 26 per cent of urban dwellers live in moderate poverty and 7.2 per cent in extreme poverty, including most of the informal recyclers.

On this southern hemisphere wintertime July night in La Paz, the group of women are virtually invisible as they gather around the dumpsters located in a corner of the Plaza Avaroa, in the area of Sopocachi, where residential and public office buildings are interspersed with banks, supermarkets and other businesses.

It's a good place for picking through the waste in the dumpsters, and the women find paper, newspapers, plastic and aluminium containers. Although the volume of waste is large, each one of

the garbage pickers manages to collect no more than one or two kilograms on one of the days that we accompanied different groups of the women in their work.

The silence is broken on some occasions when salaried municipal cleaners show up and throw the women out of the place, because they also compete to obtain materials that they then sell to recyclers. This is a moment when it becomes especially clear that garbage has value.

That is one of several reasons that forced the informal garbage pickers to come together in an association called EcoRecicladoras de La Paz. "There is no work for us, and they only listen to us when we organize," says María Martínez, 50, the recording secretary of the 45 members, who also include a few men.

In Bolivia, trash is not separated into reusable and non-reusable waste in homes or offices. This task is carried out by private recycling companies, who buy the raw materials from informal waste

collectors such as EcoRecicladoras.

Martínez, with slightly greying hair, says she comes out every evening. "I was a domestic worker until I was 30 years old. When my daughter was born I couldn't get a job. I collected plastic bottles, clothes and shoes and sold

them to the factories, but the recycling companies who pay really low prices emerged," she complains.

It takes about three months between the initial collection and the final sale of the recyclable materials. Martínez collects the materials, carries around seven kg on her back, walks about three kilometres and patiently stores them until she has enough to sell them to the wholesaler.

"One year I collected 200 kilograms of scrap metal and sold it for 150 bolivianos (about 20 dollars)," she recalls. The recycling companies want to buy by the ton, she explains, with a grin, because it is impossible for them to reach that volume.

She represents a second generation of garbage collectors. Her mother, Leonor Colque, is two years short of turning 80, and has been combing through garbage dumps and trash on the streets for 40 years. On her back she carries a cloth in which she hauls a number of pieces of paper and some plastic waste.

"They should stay in school because this job is not for young girls," she recommends, sadly, because she could not achieve her goal of sending one of her daughters to a teacher training school.

At 58, Chacolla, like almost all women garbage pickers, is the head of her household. Her husband, a former



WOMEN IN BOLIVIA DEMAND RECOGNITION

in return. These Bolivian women who help clean up the environment from dawn to dusk. Many of them are from Indigenous communities. To fight for their rights, they have formed a group called EcoRecicladoras de La Paz.

International Network of Street Newspapers

public transport driver, lost his job due to health problems and occasionally works as a welder, door-maker or bricklayer.

When she goes out to sort through trash she is accompanied by her daughter, Rosario, who explains and expands on what her mother says, calling for a change in the public's attitude towards them and respect for the work they do as dignified, emphasizing, as they all do, that they deal with recyclable waste, not garbage.

"I walk with the Lord in my heart, he always helps me," says Angelica Yana, who at 63 years of age defies the dangers of the wee hours of the morning in the Achachicala area, on the outskirts of La Paz, five kilometres north of the city.

"Nothing has ever happened to me," says Yana, who leaves her home at three in the morning to scrape up enough to support a son who offers fine finishing masonry services, and her sick husband.

At the age of 70, Alberta Caisana says that she was assaulted by municipal cleanup workers while she was scrounging for recyclable materials. She now carries a credential issued by the Environmental Prevention and Control Directorate of the Autonomous Municipal Government of La Paz, and wears a work vest donated by development aid agencies

from the governments of Sweden and Switzerland.

She relies on her uniform and identification card as symbols of protection from the indifference of the people and aggression from local officials.

The mother of a daughter and the head of her household, Anahí Lovera, saw her wish to continue her university studies frustrated, and at the age of 32 she combines collecting plastic bottles with helping in different tasks in the construction of houses.

Others, they say, sell clothes and other recovered objects in street markets, such as the famous one in Villa 16 de Julio in the neighbouring city of El Alto, where used and new objects are sold in an area covering two kilometres.

Lovera's work appears to go smoothly, but she and her colleagues describe the moment of dealing with the buyers. They deliver an exact volume and weight of products and the buyers declare a lower weight in order to pay less.

"This sector isn't noticed by society, especially because we work with waste, that is, with what society throws away; this work is 'devalued'," said Bárbara Giavarini, coordinator of Redcicla Bolivia-Reciclaje Inclusivo.

One sign of the public's recognition of

the "grassroots recyclers," as they call themselves, could be the direct, sorted delivery of the waste, which would facilitate the women's work, she said.

Redcicla, a platform that promotes the integrated treatment of waste, has been helping since 2017 to organize them and bring visibility to their work, while fostering the delivery of waste from citizens to "grassroots recyclers" and working for the recognition of their work as dignified.

The president of EcoRecicladoras de La Paz, Sofía Quispe, supports the idea of getting help from local residents in sorting materials and delivering them to their affiliates, instead of throwing them into dumpsters where they are mixed with products that prevent subsequent recycling.

Quispe is a 42-year-old mother of three. Like most of her fellow recyclers, she walks about two kilometres on foot in search of dumpsters, dressed in the customary indigenous wide-brimmed hat and pollera or skirt.

On the night that we accompanied her, she did not find the dumpster that was usually on Avenida 6 de Agosto, probably because it had been removed and taken to another part of the city.

The impoverished garbage picker was once a skilled seamstress who worked in small family-owned factories in the Brazilian city of São Paulo. Upon her

return due to an illness, she was unable to raise the money she needed to buy a machine and raw materials.

She was also discouraged by the lack of interest among local residents in buying garments made in Bolivia, as they preferred low-cost clothing smuggled into the country as contraband.

Leonarda Chávez, another 72-year-old head of household, who collects recyclable materials every day with her daughter Carla Chávez (42) and granddaughter Maya Muga Chávez (25), feels satisfied because she can see her dream come true.

This month, her granddaughter earned a diploma in Business Social Responsibility, with which she completed her university education, in addition to a degree in commercial engineering and business administration, in a country where higher studies do not always guarantee good jobs.

Among the darkness and the objects discarded by people, hope is also alive. Rosario Ramos took the lessons of hard work and created her own goal: "I will study advanced robotics and prosthetic assembly," she says with a confidence that contrasts with the group's sad stories.

Courtesy of Inter Press Service / International Network of Street Papers



ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

EVERETT MAY

Most people can appreciate the value in having a good advocate on your side during life's challenging moments. Almost everybody has experienced a situation when an advocate was either necessary or would have come in handy. In certain circumstances advocates are not hard to find—especially if there is money involved—but that's not always the case. Sometimes your troubles have nothing to do with money, or they are something money just can't fix. Life can throw some curveballs and you never know when. Usually when it does, when you most need a team on your side, all you can hear are crickets on the field, as though everybody packed up quick and went home, leaving you alone at the bat. Now, it's just you and that curve ball. Let me tell you how to round the bases, make it home and win the game when the only person you have to rely on is you.

Sometimes you have to be your own advocate.

I became homeless in April of 2021. With practically no services available where I lived, I thought my chances would be better in San Francisco. I had dreamed of living here for more than 20 years. So, after losing my job and then my apartment, and with nothing left to lose, I decided to make a leap of faith and I came to the City. On one hand it was a blessing. I was finally where I wanted to be. On the other hand, it was also a curse because I had never imagined living in San Francisco without a home. Of course, I never imagined living anywhere without a home, so if I had to start from scratch, why not do it where I've always wanted to be? I stayed in hostels when I could and explored the city at night when I couldn't, then I'd catch a few hours of sleep at St. Anthony's when morning came. The Tenderloin became my home base.

And as rough as it is a lot of good things can be said about the Tenderloin and the people there who provide services. Eventually I could no longer afford the hostels so I took up a space with many other homeless people at night in front of GLIDE,

but I was determined that would not be my fate. I had not come to San Francisco to suffer and sleep on the sidewalk. I prayed for a home every night.

At some point I came across the Linkage Center in Civic Center. I remember that I was looking for some food. I discovered they had more to offer than just a meal. I had a housing assessment done and was told that I qualified for an SRO. I was ecstatic! After so many nights sleeping on the sidewalk this was music to my ears. I went through all of the necessary steps and it didn't take long before I got a referral to an SRO in the Tenderloin. I was so happy that my homeless days were finally over. I went and looked at the place, accepted it, and set a move in date. A date not too far off. I couldn't have been more grateful. I mean, sure the place was small, but at least it had four walls, a roof and a door. I spent the next week sleeping on the streets, but it was a little more bearable knowing that it wouldn't be for long. Finally the day came for me to sign my lease and move in. When I arrived at my scheduled appointment time I was told that I would have to come back the next day because the person I was there to see had a personal appointment.

Now here's what I haven't told you yet: I am bipolar. What's more is that at that time I was not on my usual regimen of medication. Being new to the city and without a primary care doctor yet, I was then taking a very strong anti-depressant that I was not prescribed and that I purchased on the streets. What I didn't know was that this medication can easily produce mania and even rage. And that's exactly what it did.

It isn't in my nature to lash out at others, but the drug took control. There was a scene, and Security was called. Needless to say, I did not move in on that day. Worse, I was 86'd from the building. Which was really bad considering I had to pay my rent and deposit in that office. I had backed myself up into a corner. Not only did that office handle affairs for the SRO I was supposed to move into but also for practically

every other SRO in the TL.

After the whole ordeal I was dumbfounded. I could not believe what had happened and why I lost my temper like that. It really isn't like me. It wasn't until I saw a nurse practitioner at my clinic that I started to get some answers. I told her what medication I had been taking and asked her to prescribe me some. She said, "absolutely not", and explained that that medication was not recommended for bipolar people for the reasons I mentioned above. She prescribed something different and I began to get better.

I was back in control of my mood and behavior but I was still sleeping outside.

I went back to the people who had given me the referral. I hate to say it but they weren't much help at all, not at first. It was explained to me that I was still eligible for an SRO, but because of that outburst at the housing clinic, my options were now narrow. I would have to wait for an opening at one of the buildings they do not manage. This seemed reasonable to me—after all I am the one who caused the scene. Medication or no medication, I still take responsibility for my actions.

Luckily I was able to move into a shelter while I waited for a referral and once again I felt optimistic. Sadly though, I still faced unforeseen obstacles. Getting my own place definitely wasn't going to be easy. The agency I was working with got their list of openings on a weekly basis. And every week I would check to see if I had a referral. Week after week, nothing. Once I was told I could have had a referral if not for an eviction on my record. I have no evictions on my record. Another time I was told that I'd have a referral but I was not allowed on that particular property. And this was not the property where I caused the scene, nor was it run by them. I had never been on that property and I called them to ask why I was not allowed there. They said they didn't know what I was talking about, I was not 86'd from their property. They had never even heard of me. I started

to feel that someone was working against me.

More than once the thought to reach out to the housing clinic and apologize crossed my mind. I ran this idea by the social worker I'd been working with. The one who was supposed to get me the referral. She advised me not to, that it would not help my case. I would just make things worse. I was beginning to wonder if this person was not really on my side at all. Months went by and eventually I was reluctant to even ask about a referral, knowing that I'd get the same answer. I was beginning to lose hope.

One morning I woke with a new determination though. I was not being treated fairly and I knew it. No one seemed to be on my side, so I decided that I must act on my own behalf. I must speak up for myself or stay in the shelter forever. I contacted my primary care doctor, for now I had one, and asked for a statement explaining my behavior on the wrong medication. I searched the internet and found supporting medical journals also. I looked up just who was in charge of the housing clinic where this nightmare began and found the director's email. Finally I typed a letter explaining my case and sincerely apologized for my behavior. I sent the email and turned the matter over to the universal powers.

It wasn't but two days later when my case manager came to me at the shelter and told me that I had a referral for an SRO and an appointment the next day to go and view it. My case manager and I went the next day to view the apartment, I accepted it and was able to move in a week later. Finally, a home in San Francisco! It took two years and yes my place is very small. But it's tidy, it's safe, it's warm and it's mine. And I've put a few personal touches on the place making it look pretty chic. Maybe it was luck, but I am pretty sure it would have never happened had I not been willing to step up to the plate and advocate. For myself.



PHOTO BY ROBERT GUMPERT.

SECURITY WITH INSECURITY AND THE LAW

DEREK WILLIAMS

One Saturday, I was sitting in front of the Safeway on Church and Market streets when a petite Black woman came up to me and told me that a store security guard just struck her on the head with a broomstick from behind. What made that worse was that she was on the toilet. What's a mall cop doing in a women's bathroom anyway?

A friend of mine overheard our conversation and commented that there had to be more to the story than meets the eye, but the woman insisted she was telling the truth. I asked her if she was in pain, or at

least embarrassed. She replied that she was insulted and that she was going to sue the security company.

Another person with whom I was talking wondered what would be her best course of action. I suggested to him that he escort the woman back to the store, so she could gather enough information she would need to take legal action.

About 30 minutes later, she returned and told me that the staff was uncooperative with providing the needed information. Obviously, she was disappointed, but not devastated. So, I suggested that she file

a police report, and agreed that's what she should do.

Are we as secure as we think we are? If not, why so? And what should we do? Do we know if our decisions are made based on what we consider to be facts or based on myths?

Should we be held to the rights of the individual citizen or to the justice system? In one case I know of, individual rights are likely to be undermined?

Derek Williams is a Street Sheet vendor.

PUSH TO SAVE EAST BAY'S STREET SPIRIT UNDERWAY

TJ JOHNSTON

The campaign to resurrect Street Spirit went into full swing with a benefit attracting over 100 people to the Tamarack restaurant in Oakland on July 15.

The event raised over \$8,200, Street Spirit editor-in-chief Alastair Boone announced on Instagram. She told a panel audience that her goal is to raise \$250,000, which would pay for printing, paying staff and covering other expenses for one year after the relaunch.

The Berkeley-based newspaper covering homelessness in the East Bay announced in May that its publisher, the arts job training program Youth Spirit Artworks, could no longer fund the paper after June 30. Youth Spirit Artworks had been operating the paper since 2017, when it took over from the American Friends Service Committee, which had been publishing the paper since 1995.

Boone told Street Sheet that she doesn't exactly know which dominos need to fall into place before relaunching the paper.

"I don't think there's a super clear answer to this, and that's part of what I'm sorting out right now," she

said. "I need to raise the money, but also figure out where Street Spirit will 'live,' so to speak. For example, are we working toward becoming our own independent nonprofit? Are we looking for another publisher (a relationship such as the one between the Coalition on Homelessness and Street Sheet), or are we trying to do some kind of hybrid thing? I don't know yet, but I'm working with some great folks who are helping me think through my options."

While Boone is fundraising by hosting public events and through a fiscal sponsorship with the Western Regional Advocacy Project, a San Francisco-based activist organization, Street Spirit vendors will continue to earn pocket money from selling San Francisco's Street Sheet. A few of Street Spirit's star vendors were on hand at the Tamarack fundraiser testifying how selling the paper improved their lives.

Vendor Derrick Hayes, known to his regular customers as "Brother Hayes," told the panel audience that he's housed now and was able to visit his dying mother in Florida last year, thanks to Street Spirit.

Hayes also recalled being at the right

place at the right time one day when he was selling papers on Piedmont Avenue. He thwarted the abduction of a baby by running to the would-be kidnapper, wresting the child away from his hands and knocking him out.

That incident led to a neighborhood merchant commissioning a mural likeness of Hayes on Franklin and 14th streets, one block around the corner from Tamarack.

After the fundraiser, Hayes told Street Sheet, "The store owners know me because I'm part of the street, stopping cars from being broken into. They watched out for me because I watched out for them."

Working as a vendor had as much an impact on Hayes as the people on his beat, eventually leading him to housing.

"The more papers I was selling, the more people I was meeting, the more network I was doing, the more help I was receiving, the more it changed my life," he said.

Vernon Dailey, a vendor who's usually found at the Berkeley Bowl West and the Trader Joe's in the Grand Lake neighborhood, told Street Sheet how

saddened he felt hearing the news of Street Spirit's sudden halt.

"I even had a tear in my eye," he said. "Other people were feeling bad and upset like I was. I didn't know what was going on."

Dailey's homelessness journey began when his wife died of cancer in 2016 and their house was eventually foreclosed on. Through his nephew who also sold the paper, he began his vending gig to supplement his Social Security benefits.

At the Tamarack panel, Dailey announced that he found housing and was moving in the following Tuesday, drawing applause from the audience.

"Gradually, I made a comeback," he told Street Sheet when reflecting on his experience. "I'm still coming back up."

To donate to keep Street Spirit alive, scan the code below and be sure to include a note that you're donating to re-launch Street Spirit! Or visit <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/wrap10years/donate>



MY BODY KNOWS HOW TO SURVIVE

JACK BRAGEN

The human organism is designed to survive as long as it can, to procreate when possible, and to contribute to the success, the survival, and the prestige of the group.

Human consciousness could be a product of the human body. It serves us by allowing us to think, to reason, to ponder and to be better. Consciousness, while normally it thinks itself in charge, takes a back seat to other creations of the body in some crisis situations. I'd like to illustrate some examples of how my body reacts in times of crisis.

When I face danger or a threat, my body brings about more resources, allowing me to better withstand what I'm dealing with. For example, in times when I was psychotic, my body warned me if I was about to do something potentially deadly, in some cases with a commanding voice—taking away voluntary control. In one dangerous location, my legs moved of their own accord and got me out of there.

I have been in many life-threatening situations in my life, not just when psychotic. And invariably, my body helped me get through. Much of the time, it felt as though there was a deeper instinct that would not allow me to ignore what was needed. Fear is a facet of this.

Yet, when something external, such as my housing or livelihood, are in jeopardy, my body generates a horrible weight in the gut. This is an alert, and my body probably creates it so that I won't ignore what is in front of me.

This is a sensation called terror, one of the worst sensations I've felt. When terror takes over, there is no room for anything else. Terror can feel queasy and dizzying. It can feel like I'm at the door of impending doom.

I'm not going to lie and tell you that I've been homeless. I have been incarcerated in Santa Rita and I have been in tough psych wards, such as Highland and Gladman. I could survive this when young, but I could not live it through now as a 58-year-old.

I have health issues and I'm not young; if I were to become homeless now, I would not last more than a few days.

Thus, when a threat to my housing or to my public benefits arises, my body assigns great importance to the problem, and this forces me to act to get the threat resolved. As I said, you can't ignore terror. There is such a thing as appropriate fear, and you use it as a guide. It is the basic gut feeling that powers actions.

The Contra Costa Section 8 Housing Authority, in my past, was a substantial, chronic source of anxiety. This was like a continual butterfly in the stomach. Employees often did not follow through with their jobs, making errors or creating other problems for me. When the government isn't doing its job, it is I who suffers, and not the government.

In some emergency situations, I have been very confident. I've been unafraid when, in some instances, other people

would not know what to do to get through a scenario. I'm not the biggest man, but I have stood up to bigger men, and sometimes it is they who have backed off. A physical threat in the moment goes away the next day unless I'm injured and need medical care.

At one time, I was very afraid of physical threats. But I acquired bravery, by necessity. But when it comes to housing, to keeping fed, to keeping the utilities going, I don't mess with any of that. I have a strong commitment to make certain the basics are dealt with.

When you are dirt poor like I am, you must heed certain things. You need to keep your body fed and medicated. You need your coffee. If you are a hardcore smoker, you can't just stop and pretend that you don't need it. That's too hard. Of course, smoking is something we should all be rid of—but how?

If you don't at the very least keep your body fed and hydrated, you will soon become defunct. Going hungry doesn't work if you need to function. On an empty stomach, everything is impossible.

None of this should imply to you that I'm enough of a fool to take unnecessary, careless risks. Where I live, I'm not going to go outside and smoke when it is too late in the day. I have nicotine gum.

There is a big difference between being confident in the presence of a would-be attacker versus facing homelessness, incarceration, starvation, or becoming mentally ill. Men I've met

who have been incarcerated really, really don't want to go back to that, and some are willing to kill so that they won't.

At 19, when I was a janitor, I worked in a store in East Oakland. In that store, I was threatened by two gunmen for ten hours overnight. They wanted to wait for the store management to show up so that they could rob the store. They spared my life because I was young and an innocent bystander. But they wanted to be certain that I could not identify them. That was very clear. My terrified reaction was suspended during the incident and made itself known later.

Soon after that, I became unable to work graveyard. Trauma, even if not the most efficient of emotions, seems to serve a purpose. My body didn't want me to work nights anymore. It wasn't good for me.

Anyone who has been incarcerated does not want to go back. And the same probably applies to someone who has been homeless. Homelessness must be hell, and I'm very glad I have not been homeless. I could have been, but my family has protected me from that.

Now that I'm older and know how to think more clearly, I'm attempting to put together a good career. This is not easily accomplished. But if I can succeed at consistently earning money, it will serve to give some sense of security, even if that security is all in my mind.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California.



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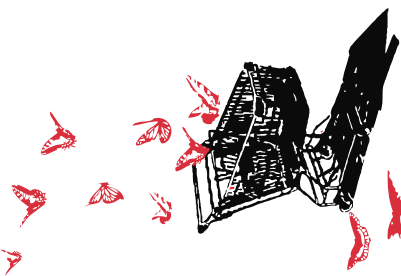


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