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STREET SHEET IS READER SUPPORTED, ADVERTISING FREE, AND AIDS TO LIFT UP THE VOICES OF THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN SAN FRANCISCO.

CURRENTLY ALSO DISTRIBUTED BY HOMeward STREET JOURNAL VENDORS IN SACRAMENTO
BEHIND THE CURTAIN OF SAN FRANCISCO’S SWEEP OPERATIONS

LUKAS ILLA

Every weekday morning, somewhere in San Francisco, well-coordinated teams of City workers destroy people’s homes. Unhoused residents beneath freeway overpasses, tucked in Tenderloin side alleys, and living in recreational vehicles in the Bayview know the horror of this near-daily operation, where they have mere minutes to collect their belongings and escape the City teams intent on seizing as much of their property as they can.

The Healthy Streets Operation Center, or HSOC, is the City of San Francisco’s multi-department apparatus that is charged with “encampment resolutions,” or sweeps. HSOC teams are made up of employees from at least seven City departments, including Fire, Police, Emergency Management, Public Works, Public Health, Municipal Transportation Agency, and Homelessness and Supportive Housing.

But these departments do not assign an equal number of employees; at many sweeps, there are up to eight police officers, but no Department of Public Health workers to be found.

This is where the root of the problem arises: HSOC’s emphasis is on the criminalization of homelessness rather than its solution. The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) deploys a handful of its Homeless Outreach Supportive Housing (HSH) teams coordinate the towing of RVs, pushing single adults and families into homelessness. HSOC does not follow the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness’s guidelines for best practices in resolving encampments, such as accommodating special needs and disabilities, addressing encampments humanely, and conducting comprehensive housing-focused outreach.

For vehicularly housed San Franciscans, an HSOC operation could cost them their entire home. When residents are not home, HSOC teams coordinate the towing of RVs, pushing single adults and families into homelessness.

Houseless neighbors deserve dignity and respect from City workers. HSOC has unfortunately failed in that mission; with an over-emphasis on criminalization, effective outreach to residents has fallen away.

Without a behavioral health-centered and by-unhoused person name approach to encampment resolutions, HSOC will continue to push people from block to block, destroying people’s homes and livelihoods along the way.

Too many homeless people have watched in horror as HSOC workers take their medication, mobility aids, survival gear, valuables, heirlooms, IDs and cell phones and toss them in the back of a garbage crusher.

Since the Coalition on Homelessness brought a lawsuit against the City in 2022, HSOC has been ordered by a judge to follow a preliminary injunction. The City shifted gears and now conducts encampment resolutions under a health emergency exemption in order to clean and sanitize the space where homeless people reside. But the guise of sanitation falls away when HSOC teams follow residents for blocks outside the designated sweep zones, confiscating their property and falsely claiming that residents can take only a predetermined amount of items with them.

For years, HSOC had been seizing as much of their property as possible and following the City’s policy to “bagging and tagging” the property of the residents they sweep. San Francisco Public Works’ policy dictates that workers must store belongings requested by residents that are not soiled, perishable or health risks.

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

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP

WEDNESDAYS @ 12:30

The Human Rights Working Group 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 ltpierce@cohsf.org

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BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY HOUSING MOVEMENT THROUGH MUTUAL AID

INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL DOGON OF THE LA COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK

CATHLEEN WILLIAMS, SACRAMENTO HOMeward STREET JOURNAL

General Dogon is an organizer at the Los Angeles Community Action Network, or LA CAN. This interview took place on April 13, 2024, at the headquarters of the organization, where visitors are greeted by a sunny reception area with comfortable chairs.

LA CAN’s sturdy cement block building is set back from East Sixth Street in the heart of Skid Row, where over 4,400 unhoused residents live on its streets, its shelters, and its single-room only hotels. Its meeting rooms, offices and gathering spaces are open to the community for organizing work.

Dogon told Street Sheet about the work of LA CAN and its campaign to repeal the city’s infamous “sit-lie” ban, which makes it a crime to sit or lie on the sidewalk.

“We have a lot of next steps—planning the overall campaign,” Dogon said. “End game is aboli

Dogon described LA CAN’s function in the community as “a bulwark—an organizing base and strategy center—for the unhoused people of Los Angeles, officially counted at over 75,000 in January 2023. Three-quarters live outside, enduring both the extremes of the desert climate and the unrelenting hostility of City Hall and the private real estate interests that dominate it. Almost a third of the unhoused population is African American—although they are only 8% of the city’s people.”

In the following interview, General Dogon describes the importance and role of mutual aid in building a revolutionary movement. As Wikipedia defines it, mutual aid is “an organizational model where voluntary, collaborative exchanges of resources and services for common benefit take place amongst community members to overcome social, economic, and political barriers to meeting common needs.”

As opposed to charity work, mutual aid projects grow solidarity and meet needs by mobilizing people rather than hoping for so-called saviors.

In the following exchange, Dogon elaborated on the role mutual aid plays in community organizing.

Street Sheet: How do we grow our campaign of mutual aid into a strategy to defeat the sweeps that are being undertaken by our cities today?

General Dogon: Revolutionary greetings, first of all!

Yeah, and thank you for that. And that’s a good question. How do we do that? A lot of folks, first of all, when they do think of mutual aid, right, what do they think of? They think of just coming out to help be their brother’s and sister’s keeper, which ain’t nothing wrong with that. That’s a good thing, we encourage people to get involved.

But in doing that, you understand me, we all got limits. There’s only so much that you can give out, because the resources are going to run out. Unless you got a well that never runs dry.

So what do you do? There’s only so much you can do because people are just going to take the resources—“thank you, thank you, thank you”—and they’re gone. People appreciate it, right, but that is not solving the problem.

Because the issue is what’s pushing the oppression to the point that we gotta give our brother sleeping bags, right, that we gotta come out here and give people survival gear—they are being hit that hard, they are losing tents, they are being swept off the street, losing everything they got. How can we just keep doing that? We can’t keep doing that.

Mutual aid, in a sense, is how you grow it—you gotta organize the brother that you’re giving that tent to, you gotta let them know what the fight is all about, what it takes to get that tent. You know, that tent didn’t come easy, it didn’t come from a well that don’t run dry.

And so we need to let people know, “You need to become involved in the fight, basically. If we gotta come out here and give you a tent, under these conditions, you already know you need to get involved in the fight.”

Because that’s what’s going to change it, because we need to stand up, come together, and fight back against what’s causing the oppression—to where this brother is even getting this tent and the sweeps are even happening—from the beginning.

So that’s how you grow mutual aid: It’s getting the people involved. Look at the Christians: The church has some good organizers, you know, you understand me?

They are going to come out there, they are going to feed you, then they, they going to tell you about Jesus, too! They going to slide up under you with the Bible, and they going to tell you all about John 3:16, and “Come on,” try to get you on your knees, “Come on, accept the Lord, come on, get him now, right now, it ain’t going to happen every day, you better get him right now!”

So that’s what we need to do in the revolution, you understand me. We come out there, we gotta give the brother food, a plate, a tent, [and] we say, “Hey, come on, these are your rights, know your rights!”—“When you see them doing this, then this is what you gotta do!”—educate our people.

“Where are you going to be this time tomorrow? We want you to come to this meeting, and then we come out and we gonna be our brother’s keeper and we gonna start doing some Street Watch, we gonna do some mutual aid, and we gonna do some revolutionary theater. We are gonna get out here, we gonna do some art and culture, we gonna decorate the place. That’s what mutual aid is, when taken to the next level.

Mutual aid reminds me also of, when you look at any war, you see the Red Cross. They are right there with their tent with the little red cross on it. They are doing mutual aid, but at the same time they got their helmet on, they’re telling people, “Do this, do that”—they doing the same thing [like us, they’re in the fight]. So that’s what it’s really about.

We gotta understand we are out on the battlefield, too. So we want to be able to take mutual aid to the level of revolution.
Camp Resolution, the self-governing encampment for unhoused Sacramento residents, received a notice on March 28 for its nearly one hundred members to vacate by May, preceding an eviction on June 1.

On May 15, the residents and their allies organized and marched to City Hall, saying "no." Then the city called off the eviction.

Earlier this week, the Sacramento Homeless Union and camp residents announced that the city rescinded termination of the camp’s lease. Assistant city manager Mario Lara sent this notice: "[P]lease accept this as the City of Sacramento's formal rescission [sic] of its Notice of Termination of the Camp Resolution Lease. The City considers the lease, and all rights and obligations of the parties thereunder, to be in full force and effect."

The camp residents learned of the looming eviction from lawyer Mark Merin, who represents Safeground, a nonprofit that currently provides city-sanctioned ground for homeless shelter, and manages the relationship between Camp Resolution and the city.

The residents stated their intention to fight back, and so throughout the month of May, their chants have been heard on the streets of downtown.

"Who are we? Camp Resolution! What do we want? Housing! When do we want it? Now! If they don’t give it to us? Shut it down!

What else do we want? Stop the sweeps!"

The campers began at the courthouse to serve a notice demanding specific performance to follow the terms of the lease, that it will renew automatically every 120 days until everyone at the camp is housed affordably and permanently and then marched to City Hall where several residents and advocates met with the press.

Crystal Sanchez, president of the Sacramento Homeless Union, and a liaison at Camp Resolution, spoke on the nature of the camp’s conflict with the city. "The definition of oppression is cruel or an unjust use of authority or power," she said. "Oppression comes in many forms for the homeless community, which is traumatizing not only to our homeless community but our communities as a whole. These oppressive systems create a cycle of poverty, instability and suffering. This looks like years of forced migration in the form of sweeps. To fund systems that never intend to resource or house. To violent cycles of displacement and losing everything at the hands of authority figures. To a set of false narrative and set of expectations of hopes to the unhoused and to the community as a whole. What’s left is the remnants of broken promises, broken contracts, that the city of Sacramento continues to hand down to this community. Big business here looks like what we call ‘poverty pimping.’ Millions of dollars coming down on behalf of backs laying on the streets that were never actually intended to go to them or support them."

Sanchez called upon the crowd to ask if they have received that funding in any way, shape, or form, to which the crowd called back "NO!"

Additional speakers addressed the crowd. Tamatha, a resident at Camp Resolution states "All they give us is a bus pass and food stamps," she told the crowd. "We know where we want to go, we need services". Donald Cooper, another resident speaker, added that residents got everything they needed on their own.

Camp Resolution members see the encampment as a safe haven from recurring violence and trauma. "I don’t even wanna call it a camp, it’s home. It’s community,” Sanchez said. She cited some important statistics reflecting the general homeless population: 44 of the 48 current residents have a disability, and all reported a chronic health illness or major health diagnosis. Most of the camp’s residents are aged 45 or older.

"The camp itself is a resemblance to what is actually on our streets currently," Sanchez added. "Camp Resolution has always been about the fight to not only protect the residents of Camp Resolution but also to those experiencing homelessness as a whole as it, and many other organizing brothers and sisters came out of a statewide fight started in 2019 by the Union. There are union members and camps across the state fighting for something similar to what Camp Resolution has been able to accomplish."

Camp Resolution council member Susan Alhaq also touched on the violence of sweeps. "I’ve been homeless for 13 years," she said. "And I’ve been swept, had everything taken away from me. I felt I was less than a person, they took that from me."

Camp Resolution costs only $5,900 to run, according to Sacramento’s city audit whereas operating costs from First Step Communities for equivalent services cost $3.3 million. With minimal cost to the city, advocates see little justification for eviction.

Anthony Prince, a lawyer representing the Sacramento Homeless Union and Camp Resolution in regards to the specific performance order, criticized the city and its practices regarding homelessness. "Let me start by saying that this is a clear cut case of breach of contract," he said of the eviction order. "This is a legal issue and political issue. There is no question in our minds that the undue influence of this district attorney is putting pressure on the city which the city was only happy to accept and then turn around and intensify the sweeps all across the city of Sacramento. There is only one place in Sacramento that is legally immune from those sweeps because the people there fought tooth and nail to get that space, and that space is named Camp Resolution, am I right?"

The lawsuit also calls on the city to honor the lease terms with Camp Resolution, especially clauses that name residents as beneficiaries and automatic lease renewals every 120
The city claimed victory in its lawsuit against Sac City.

On May 28th, the city discussed the lawsuit during a closed session, the camp descended upon downtown again to march from the Capitol Building to the city hall. At the Capitol, the camp and its advocates spoke about the lawsuit and the struggles surrounding life at the camp, as well as its upsides compared with the struggle of homeless living before the camp. One such advocate is mayoral candidate Dr. Flojaune Cofer, who argued the city should live up to the terms of the contract.

That agreement was [that] until the people of Camp Resolution were found permanent housing that the camp would remain open," she said. Empathizing with the struggles of the homeless community, she continued "I'm frustrated because the city could have done more under the current agreement, to make sure that there's water on site and electricity on site."

Cofer had previously experienced self-governance when living in Michigan, which made her sympathetic to those living in the camp. Additionally, her experience as a public health professional has made her conscious of the residents’ health concerns, knowing that constant displacement lowers life expectancy.

Shonn, a camp resident who moves in a wheelchair, gave a touching story about her experience with disability and homelessness. "I got chased around by the cops, and people who weren't even homeless stealing my stuff," she said through tears. "My generator so I could breath, my truck so I could move my trailer – gone. These are people with houses who took my stuff. Now finally I got to Camp Resolution. I didn't have to run no more, I didn't have to be scared no more. I can't lose that place. I can't go back out like I was." A crowd member called out, "You're not gonna nowhere til we get you a house."

Shonn told the crowd about her experience becoming disabled and the dehumanization that homelessness brings. "You people need to know we are people, we do care, I raised three kids here, I went to work, I went to college. I did those things. I studied three years in community college to be a vet tech. I had three kids. I came home from work I could barely walk, and get up the next day, go back and work. I didn't want to be here, I don't wanna live like this, I didn't want to be back and work. I didn't want to be here, I don't wanna live like this, I want to take a shower. I haven't taken a shower in years. I dump a bucket of water on my head every day. It's ridiculous. I am a person and I deserve to be treated like one."

Satearah Murphy, camp resident, added in support "No air, no amenities. I still gotta wash my butt like I'm outside, still gotta cook like I'm outside, while cooking while I'm inside. You know? So that's what housing is to me — an opportunity."

After marching to City Hall, advocates entered City Hall to comment on homeless spending, joined by members of LGBTQ+ and Jewish organizations.

The camp's advocates spared few harsh words for the council, telling them exactly how they believe they should proceed in regards to the lawsuit and why it would be beneficial for their bottom dollar to do so. Many speakers focused on demanding nothing but water and electricity and to be left alone at the camp and, if they remain able to do so, they will be able to continue placing homeless people into homes as done on multiple previous occasions.

"I ask you, truly do better because this is cyclical violence", said one commenter. "A person died within the past two weeks right outside that door," referring to the body of a homeless individual found in front of City Hall earlier in the month. Commenters got their point across regardless of the 2-minute time limit imposed for comments, often speaking over the cut microphones loudly enough for the audience to hear, with a valiant fervor in their hearts that they will get their demands met at any cost.

Delphine Brody blasted the council, continuing after their mic was cut off. "Working tirelessly setting up the systems of community mutual aid that you've been blowing off in favor of using your organized terrorism force to steal their belongings, hounding them literally to death," they said. "Where's our housing first? Where's our rent control? Where's our training on the new issues? You spend all your time chasing people, stealing their shit!"

After March 28, the city announced they would extend the deadline for Camp Resolution to leave to May 31, which passed without any evictions. Two months later, the threat of removal has now passed.

With the power of resilient campers and swift legal action from the Homeless Union, Camp Resolution remains a unique project providing safety, support and a future for its community inside and out of its gates.
By the end of June the Supreme Court will rule on a law dealing with "Public Camping" that was originally ruled on by the 9th Circuit of Appeals in 2018.

In this case "Public Camping" refers to tent communities of at-risk people reduced to sleeping outside because they have no other stable housing.

There's been a 12% rise in homelessness since 2022. About 650,000 people are living without a home, more than has ever been recorded before. Half of all those people are forced to sleep outside.

In response to this staggering crisis of human suffering places like Grants Pass, Oregon started fining these people for sleeping outside. Fines across the country were anything from 250 to 5,000 dollars.

The fines were interrupted by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision that they were cruel and unusual punishment... ...but only in communities that didn't provide sufficient shelter space. Rather than build housing, it seems like Grants Pass chose to push this issue to the Supreme Court.

So now they'll ultimately decide on the legal validity of the law... but not on the morality of people that would kick houseless people while they're down.

By Ben Passmore
For 99% of human beings, rejection is a painful experience. It is a gut matter whether it's actual or imagined, or if it's intentional or incidental. In all of its forms, rejection undoubtedly hurts. And it's the same for unhoused people.

For some reason, many affluent people dislike unhoused people. They feel they can treat those less fortunate any way they want, and that's better than having them knock on their doors. Homeless people seem to face a great deal of rejection coming from those they ask for help. A real bit of staying away, turning a cigarette or a phone call on their behalf. But most housed people are looking out for No. 1, and they are afraid to get involved. Others see homeless individuals as less than people.

When some people encounter another who appears unhoused, it can bring apprehension. Sometimes, that's just a gut reaction. As with any person you don't know, you don't always know who you're getting until you get it.

As I'm writing this, it is past 9 p.m. and it is dark out. By habit, I was exiting my building through the side exit, which is unlit. I wanted to go to my car and smoke before bed. I'd fallen asleep earlier, which turned into a very long nap.

When I tried to open the heavy steel gate—the second locked door to get to my car outside—the motion to open the gate revealed an obstacle. I realized I was pushing up against a man. It was dark and all I could see was a brown blanket covering a large person.

He offered to get out of my way. Speaking softly, he said he missed his bus and had been at Starbucks. I declined his offer for him to move aside, and he thanked me. He said he was going to keep warm. I got my key, and I went back into the building lobby, considered pushing back to the room. Then I decided I needed my smoke, so I exited through the building's front door to get to my car. If anyone wanted to beat me up or mug me many can, they did, however unlikely. But the man also didn't know me, and that could also be a deterrent.

I had most of my smoke and drank bottled water. When I looked at my watch, the display was 9:11. Whenever I see 9:11, I erroneously think the universe is trying to warn me of something. So, I put out my one-third remainder of cigarette and re-entered the building through the front door.

In different contexts, such as in an affluent neighborhood or one with intolerant community members, someone would have called the police. This isn't a polity thing to do. As I have fears of what could happen to me in my future, it is not an extreme stretch to put myself in this sleeping man's shoes.

If I had been afraid, I could have turned around, taken my cigarette and could have turned and went back to my unit without turning. But I could have my smoke, and the man I'd encountered was not threatening.

I am well able to stand up to a threatening individual, regardless of how big and strong they are. You don't need to be the biggest kid on the block to stand up for your rights. I have a right to basic human respect and to being left alone when I'm not out to do harm to anyone.

Homeless people and/or panhandlers might feel rejection was warranted somehow and believes they are better than them. They may be upset when someone turns them away. An aggressive voice in response to perceived rejection may paint homeless people a dangerous, but this is not usually the truth. Homeless people have probably experienced much rejection elsewhere in their lives. Receiving a stiff rebuff undoubtedly stings.

Everyone has rights, and everyone wants to be treated fairly. I've looked very different from one person to another. Whether homeless people just appear threatening or pose an actual danger, they might be hurt on the inside because of too much rejection, especially from people who have plenty in their lives and who do not appreciate how fortunate they are.

I have never been beaten by a homeless person. One of them recently raised his voice and said fighting words but I doubt that he meant any real harm. Many people just react. I know that if I fear something or someone, usually that's me generating the fear, not the situation. Sometimes you just have to take a chance. Being in the presense of a man in a blanket does not rate very high on the scale of risk. A person could do things that are far skickier without being considered a fool.

Sometimes you must take a risk, even if it is only a small risk.

For some reason, many affluent people dislike unhoused people. They feel they can treat those less fortunate any way they want, and that's better than having them knock on their doors. Homeless people seem to face a great deal of rejection coming from those they ask for help. A real bit of staying away, turning a cigarette or a phone call on their behalf. But most housed people are looking out for No. 1, and they are afraid to get involved. Others see homeless individuals as less than people.

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Sometimes you must take a risk, even if it is only a small risk.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California. His work has appeared in many publications, and he sells indie books on Amazon.
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.

To sign up, visit our office at 280 Turk St from 10am-4pm on Monday-Thursday and 10am-Noon on Friday

BECOME A VENDOR
MAKE MONEY AND HELP END HOMELESSNESS!

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!

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!

VISIT WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/Submit-Your-Writing/
OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED PIECES ASSIGNED BY THE EDITOR MAY OFFER PAYMENT, ASK FOR DETAILS!

CONTRIBUTE TO STREET SHEET!
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The Coalition on Homelessness is calling all artists to donate their work to ArtAuction24!
Scan the code below to learn more and donate.