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# STREET SHEET



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**CAMINANTE, NO HAY PUENTES,  
SE HACE PUENTES AL ANDAR.**

**— GLORIA ANZALDUA —**

*Melanie Contreras 2025*



# BAD NEWS FOR SAN FRANCISCO'S HUD HOUSING

The Trump Administration just released their Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for Homeless McKinney funds out of the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD). It is as batshit as you can imagine. Really you can't make these things up.

First of all, for years 90% of the dollars had to go to permanent supportive housing, because there are around 50 evidence-based studies supporting this practice. But these folks don't believe in science. So now no more than 30% of the funds can go to supportive housing. The problem is the funds paid for operating these projects year after year, so that means San Francisco is going to lose up to \$50 million in operating funds of a system that is already radically underfunded. That means more homelessness. The McKinney funds are divided into tiers. In what they call Tier 1, SF annually gets \$54,674,988, now that would be reduced down dramatically to almost nothing.

The press release HUD sent out said bizarre things like, "In accordance with President Trump's Executive Order, "Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets," this NOFO restores accountability to homelessness programs and promotes self-sufficiency among vulnerable Americans. It redirects the majority of funding to transitional housing and supportive services, ending the status quo that perpetuated homelessness through a self-sustaining slush fund." They also said, "Roughly 90% of the last four years (Continuum of Care) awards funneled funding to support the failed 'Housing First' ideology, which encourages dependence on endless government handouts while neglecting to address the root causes of homelessness, including illicit drugs and mental illness." Wow, are we really returning to the days

of welfare queens? Have we learned nothing in the past 40 years?

It is amazing how much the Trump ideology is aligning with local electeds in SF—with recent legislation being introduced to ban all new supportive housing that isn't recovery housing, and redefining recovery as abstinence only in San Francisco. Even Assemblymember Matt Haney and Supervisor Matt Dorsey got on the Trump bandwagon, and encouraged by some Christian-based groups seeking funding, introduced similar legislation that pits "recovery housing" against "housing first," completely misunderstanding and attacking the entire concept of Housing First.

Newsom vetoed Haney's legislation saying nothing prevents municipalities from creating recovery based Housing First models—and the California Interagency Council on Homelessness came out with guidelines basically saying "feel free, just make sure you follow the principles of Housing First." These include no evictions for relapse, choice in housing, keeping low threshold access and other proven strategies. In other words, don't do things that increase homelessness. These principles are data driven critical elements for success.

Housing First is not an ideology. It is a proven effective model with a 97%- 98% success rate in San Francisco. Housing First was created after years of failed policy where unhoused people had a slew of prerequisites to get housing such as first successfully completing transitional housing, and once in housing were treated very differently from other tenants. Then science and outcome data demonstrated that it is impossible to address jobs, recovery and other means of stabilization without housing,  
*continues on page 3...*

# 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.

Editor: TJ Johnston  
Artistic Spellcaster: Quiver Watts  
Copyeditors: Kaveh Waddell, J. Cretella

Cover Art: Caminante No Hay Puentes by Melanie Cervantes

Jordan Wasilewski, River Beck, Flo Kelly

## 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.

## HELP KEEP STREET SHEET IN PRINT!



[coalition.networkforgood.com](http://coalition.networkforgood.com)

*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@cohshf.org](mailto:mcarrera@cohshf.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@cohshf.org](mailto:lpierce@cohshf.org)

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!

# BAD NEWS FOR SAN FRANCISCO'S HUD HOUSING

*continued from page 2...* and that homelessness itself was driving up rates of behavioral health issues. The movement at the federal and state level was to remove barriers, prioritize housing retention through onsite support services, and embrace tenant rights. This approach was studied and found to be successful. However, it was never funded in full. Many supportive housing programs are underfunded and of course the entire approach has nowhere near enough funding to end mass chronic homelessness. This coupled with wholesale defunding of public housing has led to the humanitarian crisis we see today. This does not indicate failure of the model, but a need to expand it. But Trump thinks otherwise. So do our local supervisors Dorsey and Rafael Mandelman, and seemingly Mayor Daniel Lurie who supports cutting housing. They seem to forget that for many San Franciscans, they just can't afford the rent. Almost all those impacted by poverty can never be stably housed without rental assistance due to the structural disparities in our housing market.

The way the McKinney process works is that local Continuum of Care groups rank proposals based on the guidelines. They are given scoring tools as well. Then the ranked proposals are sent to HUD and depending on how much money HUD awards the ranking list is cut off when the money runs out. In this NOFA, HUD also changed the



## Meet the Boys Running SF

SINGING "MAKE SAN FRANCISCO GREAT AGAIN!"

Drug War!  
New Jail!!  
Marina the Northbeach!  
Cut Social Services to Give Cops Raises  
Sell SF to the highest bidder!  
Lock up the Mentally Ill!  
Smash Democracy  
Oppose Housing the Poor!

### TAKING SF STRAIGHT BACK TO THE 1950S

scoring with random politically driven things like 16 points for requiring treatment (proven ineffective), 10 points for requiring participation in 40 hours of support services a week (impossible—that would be one case manager for every program participant) 10 points to reduce encampments (read: sweeps and criminalization—SF will score big on that one) and 17 points for year over year Point in Time reductions.

This is an attempt to operationalize "the Utah Model" which is a massive untested program called an "accountability center" that in 2027 will be located in the deadlands outside of Salt Lake City. The concept fronts as an addiction and mental health services center, but in reality functions like a jail. Those who don't earn enough to pay the rent are sent against their will. Sadly, Utah had a

massively successful housing program that all but eliminated veteran homelessness in the past (surprise: all you have to do is provide housing to solve homelessness), and the funds for this wretched idea are being taken away from those efforts.

The big solution from HUD on longstanding housing projects that would lose funding is that they say they can convert from permanent to transitional housing. However, and this just underlines how inept Trump HUD officials are, this is impossible to do because those current tenants could not stay in the building because since they are no longer homeless, they don't qualify for the transitional housing. They can't and shouldn't be evicted. But that is the only way to transfer to transitional. Not helpful.

OK, here is another fun fact: The Trump Administration can

pull funding whenever they want if new projects show they have engaged in any reference to race and if they asked for gender beyond the binary. Since HUD previously required EVERY program to collect correct gender, including non-binary etc., that applies to most providers. This is yet another attempt by the administration to bully municipalities back to the 1950's. What it means in reality

is the only new projects they want to fund are race-blind transphobes.

Which is why they are inviting religious groups to apply. Well, not all religious groups, just the right-wing ones.

This is coupled with elimination of Emergency Choice Vouchers, which were a kind of Section 8 under Biden. Trump is eliminating everything Biden did because he is still hurt he lost to him last time. And he just can't get over it. This program serves 70,000 formerly homeless households and is being completely eliminated. Over 1,100 households will become homeless in San Francisco as of October 2026 unless some miracle happens and locals are able to replace this on-going funding.

What a sad state of affairs. ■

BECOME  
A VENDOR  
MAKE MONEY  
AND HELP END  
HOMELESSNESS!

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



# The Beauty of True Solutions

Homelessness affects all of us, whether we have housing or not, but of course it hurts those living without homes worst of all. Having thousands of people without housing, without sanitation, without privacy, living outside and having thousands more in shelter in a small city like San Francisco is a humanitarian crisis. Unlike many crises, this one is a crisis that is man-made through poor policy decisions, and lack of corrective action. This crisis does have true solutions. The beauty of true solutions is that they satisfy everyone – from the frustrated neighbor heartbroken by seeing their unhoused neighbor placed in shelter only to return to the streets, to the exhausted small business owner tired of watching people just being moved from block to block only to return, to the unhoused person who finally has a place of their own.

November 2018 Proposition C, entitled “Our City Our Home,” is a national model for a local municipality to address homelessness. Has it solved homelessness? Of course not, yet 2018’s Prop. C achievements have surpassed all expectations:

- More than four thousand people sheltered - voters were promised one thousand.
- More than 5,100 people housed, including 1,700 children, voters were promised four thousand
- Almost 16,000 people received behavioral health services
- Almost 23,000 households received prevention services.

Beyond the numbers, Prop. C succeeded in focusing on the following areas:

- Diversifying innovations in the shelter system to serve individuals who the shelter system failed to serve in the past, such as the addition of tiny homes and semi/non-congregate shelter
- Expanding housing that serves people with behavioral health issues, such as the opening of board and care facilities, and expansion of step-down (recovery) housing.
- Diversifying the treatment system to fill gaps in the system such as expansion of women’s beds, and low barrier/high needs care centers.
- Innovative housing solutions, including rental assistance in the private market, acquisitions of newly constructed apartment buildings, acquisitions of hotels and transforming into housing.
- Ensuring equity by funding previously ignored populations. We have pushed hard for housing for families and youth, and for members of the Bayview community, all traditionally getting too small a piece of

the pie.

San Francisco, like all West Coast cities, has seen rising rents drive homeless rates, and solving homelessness itself is growing increasingly complicated. The longer people are out there, the more their health deteriorates, and the higher mental illness and substance use rates go. This issue has been left at municipalities’ feet. Tired of waiting for the feds to do right, the Coalition on Homelessness decided to take people’s initiative into our own hands. We spent a year and a half gathering input, meetings with allies, opponents and everyone in between, then gathering signatures and getting it passed.

## MORE THAN A MOMENT; IT’S A MOVEMENT

Staff at the Coalition on Homelessness are embedded in the movement to end homelessness. We approach this work with humility and Ella Baker’s style of “servant leadership” meaning we strive to work side by side with people. Movements happen when a group moves toward a single goal, and there are always lots of different perspectives as it should be – diverse movements are always stronger. Community organizing requires active listening and constantly learning. This experience and expertise has allowed the Coalition on Homelessness to work with the oversight body and city officials to ensure a successful rollout of the measure. We don’t approach this work with rigid ideology, except a commitment to centering research, the experience and expertise of unhoused people and front line service providers. From there it is a matter of developing consensus. Listening carefully to arrive at solutions that are effective is our secret sauce, because we believe the smartest person in the room is the room.

The movement to end homelessness requires the ability to hold several truths at once. We can learn from science on this issue, and we can learn from unhoused people and front line service providers. We need more housing at the same time we need more shelter. We need more traditional treatment programs, while we also need more innovation that meets people where they are at. We need low-barrier housing that is recovery- and service intensive-based, in addition to needing low barrier housing that has a focus on other needs. None of these interventions should be pitted against each other, but according to national best practices, each of our interventions need to be right-sized. This should be based on the science of data-based modeling to determine which mix of investment results in the biggest decrease in street homelessness. National best practices

include opening two to three units of additional housing for every additional shelter bed to create system flow and ensure shelter beds open up. All of this work must be coupled with “by-name” system coordination to ensure every unhoused San Franciscan has a clear pathway off the streets. Some people need treatment, workforce development, medical care, legal assistance securing benefits, and so forth. A home is something everyone needs to thrive, and it is a prerequisite to addressing any of these issues. Investments in housing and shelter must be coupled with right-size investment in prevention to keep people from becoming homeless in the first place. Housing is expensive. Shelter is expensive. Treatment is expensive. We can’t solve poverty-related socioeconomic issues such as homelessness without money. But we can make sure every dollar is well spent.

## THE BEAUTY OF THE VOTER MANDATES

Voters mandated categories for the Prop. C funding to be spent on. The breakdown for housing is that at least 50% of the funds go to housing, with 25% of that housing being for families and 20% for youth. In addition, at least 25% of the entire budget must be spent on Behavioral Health, and at most 10% of the fund spent on shelter, and at most 15% of the fund spent on prevention.

The categories were deliberately designed based on evidence-based best practices and City-provided data. There has been much said about the Prop. C categories and the desire of some electeds to move money from housing to shelter. Their idea is typically explained that shelter is quicker to get up and running and less expensive. Neither are true. Housing First is an evidence-based model, has been massively researched and it works across the country. In SF, our supportive housing has a 97% success rate. Regardless of current political winds, nothing solves homelessness like a home.

Obviously, building housing takes time and is expensive; however it does save money in both the long run and in the short term. It is worth the effort. Private market rental assistance, acquisitions, fully utilizing public housing stock all have equal if not lesser costs than shelter, and can be put in place just as fast. For maximum results, a combination of housing interventions work best. Housing is so popular that we ran out of it. It is not as the Trump Administration says a failure because there are still homeless people on the street, the failure is that the country has not invested enough.

Of course, we must do more in addressing





the needs of those in supportive housing, we need more housing for people with higher behavioral health/health acuties, and we need more just simply extremely low-income housing. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. The lack of investment is the failure, not the housing itself. Blaming homelessness on providing housing is akin to blaming hunger on the type of food rather than the lack of it.

Sure, it is preferable to have people in shelter than on the streets. The City has been adding shelter beds, however the problem is shelter beds are full because few people are leaving them. When that happens, homeless people in shelters are left in limbo without the stability of a home, indicating an inefficient use of expensive shelter funding, and street homelessness increases dramatically as soon as just one year out from the initial shelter investment. The path off the streets looks different for everyone, but the data is clear; a system that puts all its eggs into band-aids only leads to dead ends, revolving doors and increased homelessness. This is where system modeling comes into place. This is not a personal opinion, it is science. It is important to add the right amount of investment in each category to maximize results.

Moreover, Prop. C does have plenty of flexibility within it. We designed it that way. For example, many policy makers and community members would like to see more housing for individuals leaving treatment, as well as short-term housing such as the restore beds that are designed to quickly house people with severe acuties. Prop. C requires at least 25% of funds be spent on behavioral health, and housing for that population is delineated in the legal text as an approved use of those funds. These interventions can be and have been funded with behavioral health funds.

While Prop. C funds are being fully used for yearly operational costs, there are still one-time funds left over from the first two years when money was collected—but not expended—during the court battle. Our work has been to find creative uses for those one-time funds—because of rent income disparities, often homelessness requires ongoing investments. However, an intervention like the five-year housing subsidy is a way to utilize one-time funds in a way that can lead to permanently leaving homelessness behind.

More importantly, the funding categories offer SF voters accountability. Designed based on science rather than political winds, they compel conversation. Each year, that conversation has resulted in better decisions, saving valuable housing dollars for families and youth at a time those populations were increasing. For example, when Mayor London Breed wanted to cut housing from families and youth, and use that funding for single adult shelter, the conversations led by then-Supervisor Hilary Ronen, resulted in finding funding. We asked the Controller about interest accrued by the fund and if we could use that. That allowed the Mayor to get her priorities funded, a more reasonable per person budget for tiny homes—it started at \$120k per person per year— and the preservation of housing for families and youth. This turned out to be incredibly important because we were on the cusp of a massive increase in childhood homelessness. These conversations have often improved outcomes with all parties being satisfied and, in the end, producing results through consensus building. We are confident Prop. C would never have been nor continue to be successful without them.

Homelessness policy in SF has failed because of the constant use of homeless people as

political footballs, forcing smart policy to take a back seat as a result. Having categories forces the conversation. In each of these negotiations, SF did move money around. We ended at a good place with all parties being more informed. We protected valuable resources while getting creative in a new expansion. We found new funding sources. We cut exorbitant costs. Again, these positive results would not have occurred if the categories did not exist. For example, it is clear that very few resources would have gone to hidden homeless populations like families and youth without the categories.

Mayor Newsom cut shelter from 1,800 beds to 1,200. Since then, Mayors Lee, Breed and Lurie have focused on expanding shelter. Today we have 50 sites with 3,700 beds. However this massive investment has some shortcomings. We have two issues in our shelter system in SF that are happening. Many people are entering shelters and leaving right away, but very few are moving into housing. (Across all clients in the reporting period, only 13% exited to permanent housing - no data for half of clients.) We have an issue with flow. We also have more people entering homelessness than are exiting it. That is why prevention investments are so valuable. We still have shortfalls, especially in ongoing prevention housing subsidies that keep people on fixed incomes in their rent control apartments. Such shortfalls drive up the number of elderly San Franciscans experiencing homelessness. The data suggests we need expansions in all three areas – but the science of modeling, not the political trend of the moment should dictate how much investments in each area. San Francisco does have a strategic plan for single adults that does just that and lays out what proportion of new resources should go to each category. Let's make decisions based on science, not politics. ■



# LESSONS LEARNED IN MY 10 YEARS OF PSH ADVOCACY

JORDAN WASILEWSKI

As of mid-October this year, I have been stably housed in San Francisco for 10 years. For the first time in my adult life, I became a tenant with my name on the lease and am living alone, instead of subletting with others.

That was also my 10th anniversary in permanent supportive housing, my 10th anniversary in a single-resident occupancy hotel, and also my 10th anniversary of permanent supportive housing and SRO activism. I became an activist because I realized PSH in San Francisco is a total shitshow.

When I first went into a PSH/SRO in October 2015, I immediately learned about all the unjust policies, such as tenants paying over half their already low incomes towards rent, having to live in a box in the Tenderloin, the inspections that seem to be about anything but health and safety, arbitrarily evicting tenants for missing a spot, the corruption of the SRO collaboratives, and having to navigate common bathrooms. And to top it all off, each floor of the first SRO I lived in had single-use water closets and toilet rooms that were gender-specific—something I couldn't endure as a trans woman.

At the beginning of 2016, fortune started to smile upon me. I got a room with an in-unit bathroom, and I began my involvement with housing activism in the Mission. I spent the year by going to government meetings, advocating for homeless people, building relationships and community, and just learning the lay of the land. By my one-year anniversary, in October 2016, I had scored a victory when the common bathrooms in my building were made gender-neutral. Lessons learned: start small and work your way up and that your early days in advocacy are a time to listen. With that said, sometimes you need to carve out your own niche.

By my 2-year anniversary, I had done something that surprised me: I was appointed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors to the SRO Task Force. I never thought in my life I would serve on a commission. At my second meeting, I introduced a motion to recommend the Supervisors into expanding the gender-neutral restroom ordinance to common bathrooms in SROs. The motion passed, and then-Supervisor Hillary Ronen started drafting it. Lessons learned: The good thing about serving on a commission is that you learn a lot about city government.

The bad thing? The same.

Three years in around October 2018, I was continuing my work on the commission. Mayor Mark Farrell had signed the all-gender restroom ordinance on Valentine's Day. I was fulfilling my duty as an advisory commissioner, which besides pushing policy and legislation, but also reacting to such and making sure that tenants in SROs were being adequately served. I had many ups and downs, but I also was busy helping to get the homelessness measure Proposition C passed—fun fact: I signed a pro-Prop. C ballot argument and campaigned for Matt Haney to be elected as a Supervisor. Lesson learned: build relationships, because those will come in handy later on.

By year 4 in October 2019, a lot had happened. I spent my last year on the commission advocating for what would become #30RightNow, which would cap permanent supportive housing tenants' rent at 30%. I went on a hunger strike earlier that summer, which got me on Page One of the Examiner, passed the rental cap by a small margin at the SRO Task Force, won \$1 million in the city budget to begin getting rents down, and Supervisor Haney committed to legislation. In other news, I also started talking to the Department of Public Health about how the lack of SRO restrooms complicates trans people's recovery from gender confirmation surgery. Lessons learned: Seize the moment. Also, there is a whole life after serving on a commission, and passing a resolution is only the beginning.

By October 2020, with five years under my belt, around 700 tenants benefited from their rent reduction to 30% of their income from the previous year's allocation after Senior & Disability Action raided the mayor's office to get it funded in early March of 2020. Still, after continuing to build a coalition, on October 20, Supervisor Haney introduced the legislation, and it would pass the Budget & Finance Committee after 80 people spoke in support during public comment. All of this, during the darkest days of the pandemic. The Board of Supervisors later passed it unanimously, then Mayor London Breed signed it. I also started writing for Street Sheet that year. Lessons learned: Sometimes crises can lead to opportunities and paradigm shifts (i.e.: maybe SROs with shared bathrooms are not the best response

to homelessness after seeing COVID's impacts on us tenants).

By October 2021, after six years, my rent and the rents of most of the remaining permanent supportive housing tenants went down to 30%. Even though it passed earlier that year, it was still a fight to get it implemented in a timely manner. One day before we were scheduled for a City Hall protest, the mayor finally announced its funding. Success! On a personal note, only a few days after my rent reduction, I moved into a step-up building, and after seeing the measure's implementation in December, I was able to focus on my vaginoplasty the following month. Lessons learned: Grit may be the most important part of a campaign. Also, you haven't lived until you make Sunshine Ordinance requests to the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) from your hospital bed after major surgery.

By October 2022—on the seventh year—with the pandemic mostly passed, I got my mermaid surgery early that year and settled into normal with the rest of the world. I met with PSH tenants in New York City who successfully pushed for legislation protecting their rights. Also, with #30RightNow in the rearview mirror, I was wondering what was next. The year was filled with responding to the San Francisco Chronicle's expose on PSH and trying to get tenants behind a vision. Eventually, Dean Preston agreed to sponsor a Supervisors' hearing on evictions in permanent supportive housing. Lessons learned: Process can be messy, and even when it's for a worthy cause, some people exploit crises for their own gain.

By October 2023—eight years hence—the hearing had been held. While HSH made some policy recommendations for non-payment evictions, not much has been done on them. In August, some of us had presented at the Homelessness Oversight Commission around this issue. However, Housing First started seeing backlash, as did our rights, which continues to this day. Lessons learned: Messaging is key. Find the stakeholders you need, not just the ones you want. While it's hard to herd cats, when you successfully herd them, you are rewarded.

By October 2024, after nine years, I started to disengage and feel disillusioned by some of the toxic conversations that had been

happening around drugs and permanent supportive housing, this time with a more conservative Board of Supervisors. I needed to engage in self-care, take a step back and fade into the background as a writer, which sometimes is a good thing. This October, just before my 10-year anniversary of being a PSH tenant activist, I wrote a piece in 48 Hills in reaction to a bad piece of sober housing legislation. Maybe I will come back to activism, who knows?

As I reflect back on these 10 years, there have been many achievements, but also there were many lows, many lessons learned, some moments where I've had to really apologize to people and rebuild trust, several pieces of bad news and missed opportunities. However, in a world where there are crises seemingly every day, I think about how staying on message and having a positive vision is needed to combat demagoguery is more important than ever.

I am for Housing First and harm reduction. I am for policies that balance autonomy with health and safety. I am for policies that are thoughtfully and rationally crafted by and for the community as opposed to demagogues and grifters. I am for recovery housing, but also open to shifting paradigms in non-sober housing that cause relapse. Having an apartment with a fridge and stove in an outer neighborhood may be more conducive to recovery than a Sword of Damocles over the heads of residents in the Tenderloin, South of Market and the Mission.

Lastly, I wanted to say that I have never been honored by any organization or any government entity for what I have done, even as I have made a difference. That is OK, as I was never in it for the glory. But, if you were touched by my activism, or if you are a permanent supportive housing tenant who had their rents reduced, or if you want to be an activist partner, please ping me. I don't know if I have 10 more years, but I want to say that my ethic around advocacy for permanent supportive housing is that I want this to be about all of us and to make lasting change. As Bernie Sanders said, "Not Me, Us". ■

*Jordan Wasilewski (vash-uh-LEV-ski) (she/they) is a long time permanent supportive housing tenant activist who can be reached at: jodav1026@gmail.com*



# “QUESTION AUTHORITY”: VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT ON FLORENCE “FLO” KELLY

INTERVIEW BY RIVER BECK

The Coalition on Homelessness relies on the dedication of many incredible volunteer organizers and activists. One organizer in particular, through her consistent and in-depth commitment to San Franciscans experiencing homelessness, has inspired us. She has highlighted the need to more visibly recognize the diverse strengths that volunteers bring to our Human Rights and Housing Justice Working Groups. Thank you, Flo, for your dedication and how you continuously inspire us. River sat down with Flo to get to know her, and to offer our appreciation.

**Tell us a little about your background, Flo?**

I lived in D.C. and was working at Walter Reed Army Hospital in the pediatric ward as a visiting teacher of children who were temporarily unable to attend their schools. I walked past adult wards, and saw a Vietnam veteran with his head and torso and no limbs. I was so alarmed that I worked with other vets and young men of the age of being drafted into the military. We wrote copy machine produced newsletters, urging young men to stay away from the military and from Vietnam. One day, I put newsletters under the windshield wipers of the many cars parked at Walter Reed Army Hospital. The FBI followed me around after that.

In D.C. April and May of 1971 the Vietnam War protests increased as the vets threw their badges and awards, etc. on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. After seeing the city’s military-grade defenses to be used against unarmed civilians, on May 4, I was convinced to join thousands of protesters with the goal of stopping



government workers from being able to arrive at work. People from various cities were assigned to block traffic on various roadways/bridges. I was alert to having an escape route in the matrix of the city blocks, so that I would not be arrested.

My son and I moved to San Francisco in the summer of 1971, and I’ve been here ever since. I worked with the United Farmworkers Union, encouraging people to boycott stores that were selling Gallo wines and produce that did not have the UFW label. We were successful in getting some land owners to sign contracts with the UFW.

I joined my neighbors and friends visiting prisoners in Vacaville, as a group, in the prison’s Catholic chapel, and we outsiders listened to and spoke with the insiders about many of the changes going on in the ‘70s—like the women’s movement,

and providing some support for the folks who were released.

Most of my employment in SF was in early childhood education. Then from 1989 to 2005, I was a special education teacher in the San Francisco public schools, and then a substitute teacher. When I retired from substituting, I promised myself to not step over another person who is sleeping on the sidewalk. Rather, I needed to do something about people’s lack of a home.

I read many Street Sheets and found an invitation to attend the Human Rights Work Group meeting on Wednesdays at 12:30 p.m. I checked it out and here I am.

**What has helped you be a strong organizer? Or your advice on being one?**

Work on what really endears YOUR

heart—just go for it! And don’t feel like you have to do everything. Make sure you are doing outreach and that your information is informed by the community itself. And then speak that truth loudly at City Hall during public comment, it matters that we show up. For meetings, I like being at meetings in person. For me, it’s easier to hear but also to connect and understand. And to build friendships and relationships.

**Why do you organize with the COH?**

I truly appreciate that the COH is working on homelessness policy. As one person, I can accomplish some forward movement, but as part of a group that organizes folks who are with and without traditional homes, and collaborates with other nonprofits and people who are members of the City government, we can go forward together, accomplishing more.

I appreciate that the Coalition on Homelessness focuses on policy, which is so important. The City’s policies hugely affect the unhoused folks—regarding housing, shelter and supportive services. I like to work on policy—to get at the root of addressing the issues.

Also, I appreciate the dedication of the staff of the COH. I learn from them, and they inspire me. I wouldn’t do this kind of thing if I weren’t with the COH. I know you have my back, even if I got arrested. We need each other.

**Any final words to leave us inspired?**

Yes, question authority! And please come join us. ■

CONTRIBUTE TO  
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SHEET

**WRITING:** 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!

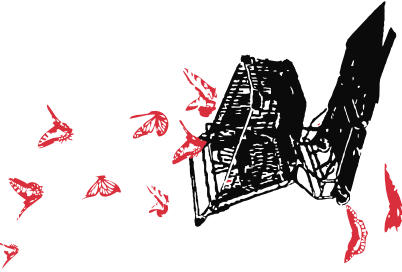
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Coalition On Homelessness  
280 Turk Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415.346.3740  
www.cohsf.org  
streetsheetsf@gmail.com

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