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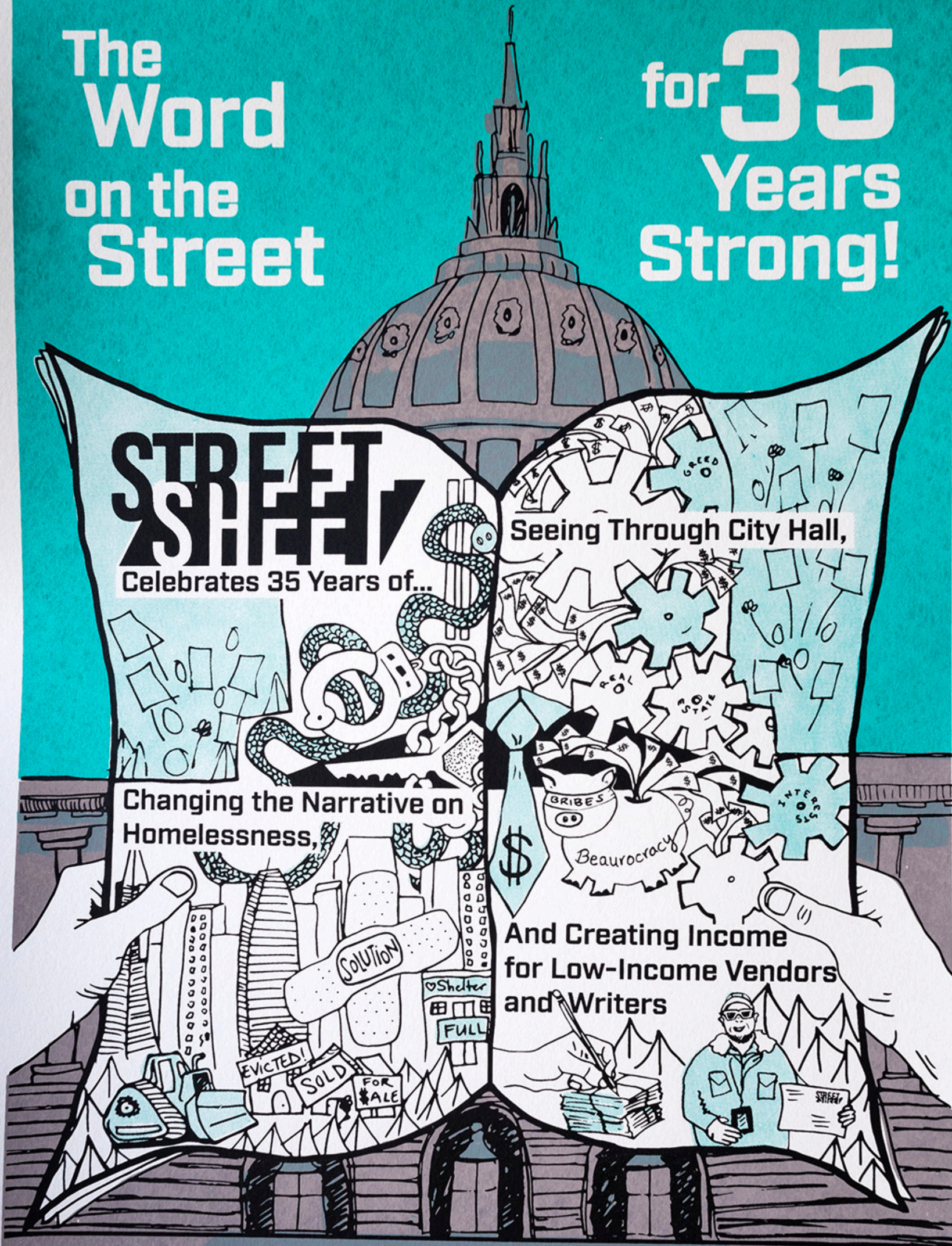
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COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SAN FRANCISCO

Poster Syndicate San Francisco

ASS-OUT IN SF: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MULTI-SERVICE CENTERS

PUBLISHED 1991

Street Sheet originally published this article in the January 1991 edition.

In talking about the Multi-Service Centers, we need to first look back in history. In the winter of 1982-83, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to place Muni buses—for homeless people to sleep in—in front of St. Anthony's in the Tenderloin and at the old General Assistance building at 1680 Mission St. At the time, this was considered a humane alternative to sleeping outdoors in the rain. It was an answer to what was believed to be a temporary emergency situation.

1982: Response to "Emergency"

Within a few weeks, when the rains were heavy and the homeless people overflowed the buses, the City's first shelters opened up on floors and church pews. At the same time, Powell Street was undergoing extensive renovation, and the storefronts and hotels along the strip were basically empty. Thus, the Hotline Hotel system was born.

It started out in two hotels facing each other, the Crown and the Stafford Plaza. Life was pretty wild at these places: six stories of SRO rooms with little or no supervision or screening requirements. Families, disabled people, substance abusers, semi-abusers lived together in two buildings.

1984: Shelters, Not Housing

The first attempt at labeling and housing/sheltering by "segment of the homeless population" began a year later, with the completion of construction on Powell Street and the move out of (now called a "transition" from) the hotels. We were all screened for eligibility for benefits. Families were moved to the Apollo and City Center hotels. Those deemed eligible for General Assistance were sent to the first presumptively eligibility hotels (which are still part of the system), and the rest of us were "referred" to what were called at the time were called "Emergency Back-up Shelters." We were supposed to be sheltered for only a maximum of a few weeks, since of course anyone who is homeless is entitled to aid that is free to enable them to get housing.

Even at this time—the middle of 1984—shelters were not considered housing. They were seen, and still should be seen, as an emergency

back-up to whatever was going to be put in place.

The Democratic National Convention came to San Francisco in June 1984. In the City's vigor to remove homeless people from in front of national TV crews, the Hotline Hotel program grew from five hotels to 28.

1986: "Programs," Not Shelters

At our first meeting with Agnos a week after he took office, the Mayor asked about the community opposition to the super shelters, and the concept of the Multi-Service Centers (MSCs) was born. The Coalition stayed involved throughout the contract and selection process for the development of these shelters. But with the premature opening of the MSCs, the banning of free food distribution, and the stepped-up enforcement of Penal Code Section 647(i), the idea behind these centers seems to have gotten lost somehow.

The reason for this historical overview is to try and illustrate the evolution of San Francisco's shelter system and explain that the MSCs, if and when they are completed and implemented as originally conceived, are simply an extension of the emergency shelter system. They provide the bare minimum of what a shelter should be. They are not an answer to homelessness. They will never be a solution. They should be considered an option.

When the Coalition and other advocates have said this, Mayor Agnos has taken it as an insult. It's not meant to be. When Agnos tells the nation that he has solved homelessness in San Francisco by opening up shelters, the homeless people take it as an insult. They should; it is one.

Multi-Service Centers/Super Shelters/ Transitional Shelters/Drop-in Centers/Hotline Hotels—none of these are solutions. They are options for people with nowhere else to go. Agnos is trying to hide a dramatic shortage of affordable housing by using his/our police force to put people into the shelter system. And although he may not want to hear it from the Coalition, sooner or later he;s going to realize that he has not and cannot resolve the issue of homelessness without permanent housing.

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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.

Editor: TJ Johnston
Artistic Spellcaster: Quiver Watts

Cover Art: Joanna Ruckman

Paul Boden, Jack Bragen, TJ Johnston, Western Regional Advocacy Project, Art Hazelwood

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 PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

PUBLISHED IN 2009

PAUL BODEN

Fear can motivate people to do some really strange things. From guns under the pillow to bars on the window to living in gated communities, fear has long been a motivator recognized as one emotion that can move masses of people to do things they would normally never consider. Certainly the current proliferation of “nuisance crime laws” and private security (or ambassadors) in public spaces is a manifestation of people’s fears after 27 years of growing poverty and homelessness is becoming impossible to ignore. Unfortunately, adding to the litany of camping, loitering, trespassing, blocking the sidewalk and panhandling laws isn’t going to change a damn thing. They haven’t so far, and we all know what they say about stupid.

People are rightfully nervous these days. Unemployment is at a level not seen since the Great Depression. Foreclosure rates continue to rise despite massive bailouts to banks and lenders. Seems almost every day, another factory is closing or laying off many of the workers. Local and state governments across the country are cutting programs, privatizing parks and other municipal services, raising fees for permits, fines and tuitions and putting government workers on furloughs, early retirement, reduced hours or layoffs—all in response to budget deficits that in many states are now in the billions of dollars.

Every night on the news are stories of people and families who never in their lives thought they would eat at a soup kitchen, get food from a pantry or sleep in a shelter alongside others who are now being referred to as the “regular homeless.” Newspaper headlines blare out about the rising numbers of homeless children in public schools, social service programs, seeing their charitable giving greatly reduced because of the recession and amazingly, in town after town and city after city, new laws being proposed to mitigate the impact of growing

and homelessness on the rest of “us”—as in those who still have a job, business or home.

The whole concept of the debate is false: business improvement districts (BIDs) have model legislation that they work with local members, governments and police to see adopted, complete with talking points and media plans. Whether the focus of each particular law is panhandling, feeding, sleeping, loitering or the current fad of sitting and lying, the premise of the campaign is the same: people don’t feel safe, and it is the presence of all these poor people that are making us feel this way.

The perception that (insert your city here) could be seen as being tolerant of poor people being visible means tourists will stay away, families outside the city won’t come downtown to shop, small business will go under, taxes can’t be collected by government, budget deficits will increase, more services will be cut and fees raised. Which also means more people will become poor and homeless. Which will also lead to more people becoming visibly destitute.

Which will also destroy our quality of life and cause people to feel even less safe.

This argument has worked surprisingly well with the mainstream media and local legislative bodies. It has a certain cause and provides a specific answer. The cause is “these people” and the answer is to get rid of them with the neoliberal kicker that is all for the greater good—Politics 101: find someone to blame, and pound the message home till it becomes its own reality.

The fear and nervousness is very real, but solutions do exist: a new New Deal, a human right to housing, education and treatment, a true living wage—any of these approaches will prove much more effective in the long run. People on both sides of the debate seem to agree on this, but the criminal enforcement advocates keep demanding “action now.” For 25 years, “action now” has meant needing even more action tomorrow. The actions we’re taking are equivalent to painting over the stain caused by a leaky pipe, five minutes of satisfaction for a

job well done, and then getting wet all over again. If the current situation on our nation’s streets was simply an issue of a lack of laws, they would have existed long before the mid-1980s.

If we as a nation had initially diagnosed emerging homelessness in the early 1980s as a “busted drain pipe” in our efforts to address poverty instead of a temporary crisis for dysfunctional people, the divisiveness, hostility and anger that surrounds today’s “action now” campaigns would be virtually nonexistent because the fear stems would be so much less.

Local governments can continue to pass all the anti-sitting, anti-feeding, anti-camping and anti-panhandling laws they want. They can continue with curfews in our public parks and turning over our downtown neighborhoods to Business Improvement Districts, but the drawing pipe is still leaking, and the water level continues to rise. We all know we’re going to have to address it at some point, and we’re running out of paint.



COVERING THE STREETS

35 years ago in 1989: San Francisco was in its first decade of mass homelessness since the Depression era.

The City opened emergency congregate shelters a few years earlier, but it would later turn away already homeless people to accommodate housed people displaced by the Loma Prieta earthquake.

That same year, Street Sheet printed its first issue. The newsletter—originally an internal memo for members of the advocacy organization Coalition on Homelessness—was printed on 8½” x 11” paper, copied and stapled on Xerox machines.

In 1990, an excess of newsletter printed specifically for a Phil Collins concert sparked an idea to have unhoused people sell them in outdoor public areas for \$1 a pop. These new vendors would now have an extra way to earn money.

Since then, Street Sheet has expanded into a tabloid newspaper. Unlike its Xeroxed forerunners, it features eye-catching, colorful artwork and bylines for its contributing writers.

The suggested donation price increased in 2014 from \$1 to \$2 to account for rising costs.

What people who were there at Street Sheet’s inception could tell you what hasn’t changed is its objective: Have unhoused people advocate for solutions to poverty and homelessness, and defend their human and civil rights.

“It just made sense that we would create our own voice,” Paul Boden, a Coalition co-founder who’s now executive director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), said. “And years later, that’s what the Coalition and [the Los Angeles Community Action Network] and others did when we created WRAP when you’re not hearing your experience with any legitimacy, and you’re being Jim Crowed by the mainstream establishment. It’s incumbent on you to create your own

voice.”

Street Sheet was born at the Coalition in the Tenderloin neighborhood at 126 Hyde St. where it shared office space with the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. The paper’s first editor-in-chief was Lydia Ely, who now works as deputy director at the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development, ran the paper for 10 years. She recalled the organization’s early days where the office was occupied for 24 hours daily because some staff also stayed there overnight.

“[There was] no windows,” Ely said. “Everybody smoked like a chimney, and it was pretty gnarly.”

Ely said that she observes that the challenges San Francisco’s unhoused community faced 35 years ago remain the same.

“It seems to me that these struggles, people who are homeless in San Francisco are really not changed so much about sweeps, confiscation, lack of support for mental health and behavioral health staff,” she said.

The City’s increasing wealth gap exacerbated these conditions and has also affected the political climate, Ely said.

“San Francisco is definitely less progressive than it was when I moved here,” she said. “The economics are always difficult for some people and they’ve gotten worse. The income disparities are pretty shocking.”

She noted that so-called “affordable housing” has grown out of reach for low-income people living on fixed incomes: housing for low-income people is generally built for people living on 40 to 60% of the area median income, or from \$42,000 to \$63,000 in today’s figures.

“And it’s not for lack of trying that we don’t build for that lower income,” she said. “But the costs of construction are so high, and the

What people who were there at Street Sheet’s inception could tell you what hasn’t changed is its objective: Have unhoused people advocate for solutions to poverty and homelessness, and defend their human and civil rights.



TJ JOHNSTON

THE LEGEND OF STREET SHEET

federal government, which controls the tools that were used to build affordable housing, has not crafted those programs to serve the very poorest people.”

Another constant in Street Sheet’s history is the paper’s distribution model. People come to the Coalition to pick up a bundle of newspapers to sell. Paul Wiegand, who was the paper’s first distribution coordinator and has since died, told a documentary crew in 1992 that Street Sheet would give a bundle of 50 papers to vendors 20 days out of the month. Today, vendors pick up bundles of up to 100 papers.

People who
are at Street
Sheet
understand
you what
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unhoused
advocate for
to poverty
homelessness,
and their
and civil
rights.

“It’s really a tiny, tiny band-aid,” Wiegand said. “But what tiny band-aid does is perhaps give people a break to where they don’t have to stand in St. Anthony’s line for two or three hours to get something to eat to where they could get the privacy of a low-budget hotel room for a few days out of the month to where they don’t have to live in a shelter. As small as these little things sound, it’s a real break.”

The origin of Street Sheet’s vendor distribution is a vital part of the paper’s lore. Back when the paper was a newsletter, representative of pop singer Phil Collins purportedly contacted to table at a 1990 concert in the Shoreline Amphitheatre. Collins was touring in support of his 1989 album “But Seriously,” which included “Another Day in Paradise.” The song, which hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart nine months earlier, is told from the viewpoint of a person who’s living unhoused and pleading for help.

Boden recalled that Collins had donated \$10,000 to print tabloid versions of Street Sheet for concertgoers.

“We had little buckets with helium balloons and had people walking around, passing out Street Sheets and asking for donations, and we raised over \$20,000 in three nights,” he said. Still, the Coalition had thousands of papers left over.

Someone at the Coalition—no one whom Street Sheet interviewed could exactly verify whom—suggested giving surplus copies to unhoused people to sell.

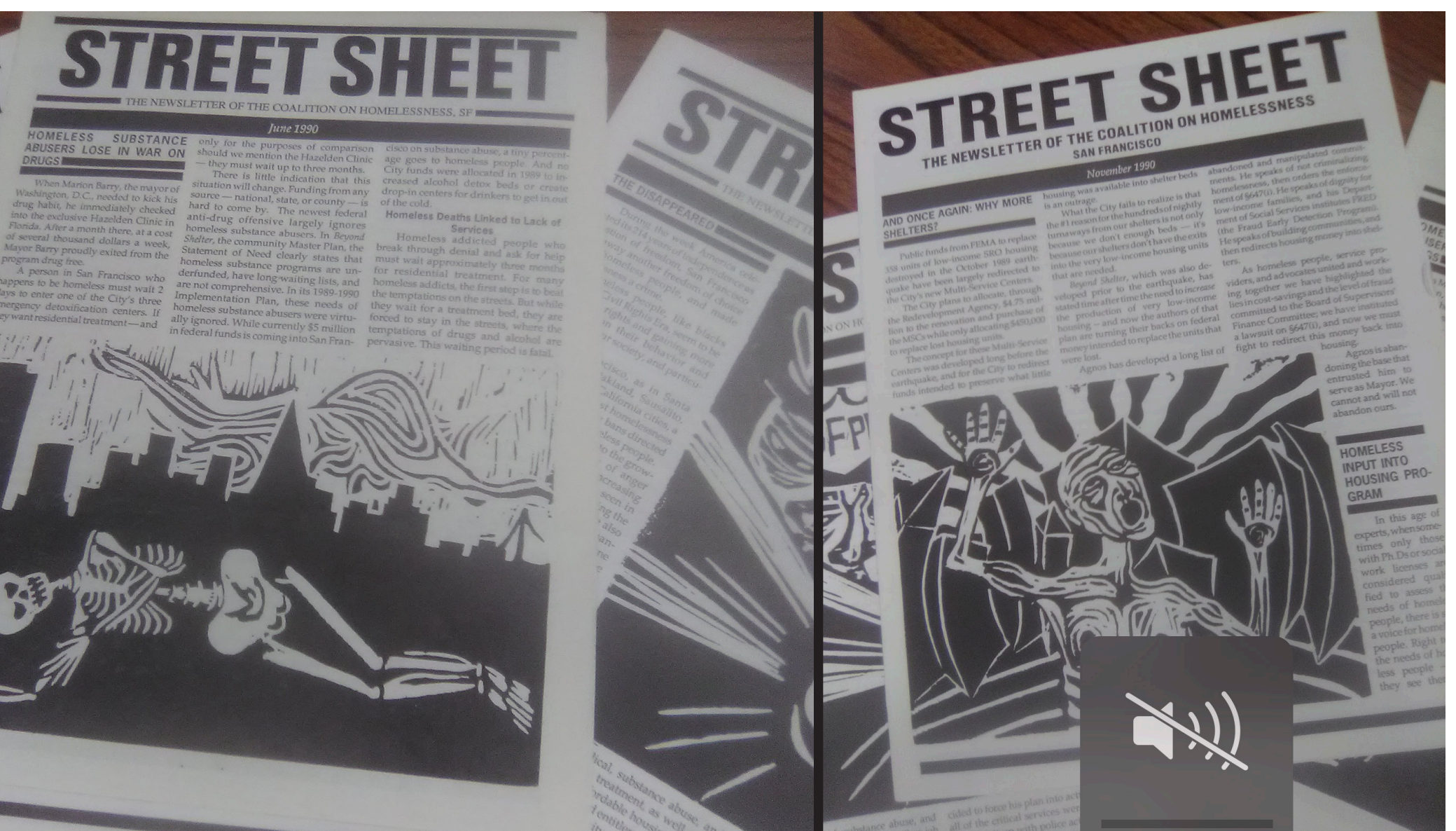
“There was this poetry group that had given us a bunch of leftover poetry papers, and that’s what we first gave out to people that were panhandling, and they came back and asked for more,” Boden said. “And they were like, ‘Yeah, man, I was getting a buck apiece on these things. You got any more?’”

The rest is history.

Excerpts from Street Sheet’s earliest issues can be found in “House Keys Not Handcuffs: Homeless Organizing, Art and Politics in San Francisco and Beyond,” which Boden, artist Art Hazelwood, and homeless policy analyst Bob Prentice co-authored. Released in 2015, this compilation also includes posters and photos that the paper featured. (Editor’s note: Street Sheet has reprinted a few selections in this issue).

Joe Wilson, a Coalition co-founder and executive director of Hospitality House, said that Street Sheet’s use of artistic expression complements the paper’s advocacy and coverage of homelessness and poverty issues.

“Using music and the arts to draw attention to a deeper crisis,” he said. “You know, just behind the curtain of prosperity of capitalism and using the vehicle of a newspaper from the streets, to kind of lift up the reality of that crisis and to hopefully point people towards some more practical solutions. Among them is this idea that unhoused people still have worth and still have talent, still have gifts, and still have voices that we need to hear.”



LEARNING FROM THE PAST

PUBLISHED MARCH 1994

Street Sheet originally published this article in the March 1994 edition

Twelve years ago, I was one of “the homeless.” We marched, side by side and sometimes hand-in-hand, with people from churches and community organizations, demanding access to treatment, an adequate income and homes.

We might have been right, but we sure were stupid. Our message was very quickly compromised to a demand for food, clothing and shelter. Community organizations became agencies; more than one church spun off a corporation. The government was responding; City Hall formed a task force and suddenly meetings were taking place to formulate a plan. Instead of flyers to announce meetings, letters of invitations were sent to executive directors for 9 a.m. meetings, held at places no one ever heard of.

Many still attended these meetings, took their friends, and spoke with great passion of the “growing crisis on our streets.” Others perched like vultures waiting for the bucks to drop.

Government did what it does best. It chose the leaders, formulated a task force, allocated resources (\$\$\$), controlled the media to frame public debate. Those invited to the meetings quickly became experts; it was only logical when the experts received the resources necessary

to address this “crisis.”

Agencies were never given money to, nor could they ever hope to, adequately address the key issues: access to treatment, adequate income or homes. They took on the food/clothing/shelter issues, so popular with City Hall and the press. These shelters were all called Temporary Emergency Facilities; the clothing was secondhand; the food was industrial. But money had started to trickle in to community groups, systems were being put into place, and a program was being implemented. Government had done its job. The media were sympathetic to the cause, agencies were focused on their contract goals and billing processes, and the homeless were now “clients.”

Very quickly everyone involved in this charade realized that without real solutions to this “crisis,” the “clients” would not magically disappear. There was a call to the federal government to do something to address access to treatment, an adequate income and housing, or this crisis would destroy America’s “once-great” cities.

The federal government responded. It formed an Interagency Council and flew its experts from all over the country. It formulated a plan. Soon 11,000 emergency shelters were open, and Mitch Snyder became a national hero. The Stewart B. McKinney Act was passed, and transitional housing was born. The Fed, with all its resources and experts,

knew it couldn’t get away with just food/clothing/shelter (the locals had tried that, and it wasn’t working). They also decided that access to treatment, an adequate income and housing were market commodities protected by the corporate desire to maintain the status quo.

The answer to the Fed’s dilemma was transitional housing. It is neither treatment nor housing. A case manager and temporary hotel room are a poor substitute for treatment and a home—but “the homeless” should be grateful, we say, since it’s better than the streets.

The experts have done a good job on their analysis of the homeless problem, and the trickle of funds is now a small stream. Thousands of people are “displaced” because their buildings are sold and developed as transitional housing programs. Community organizations that are now agencies are forming subsidiaries. Case managers are told to rehabilitate their clients.

Meanwhile, government can point to the millions it has spent to prove that it is adequately addressing “the problem.” If any problems still exist, they’re because people choose to be homeless. They’re bad clients, living under the guise of homelessness, so they can panhandle. We are running shelters, soup kitchens and clothing distribution centers. We have case managers in shelters, transitional housing programs, drop-in centers and outreach workers, support service staff and Multi-Service Centers. We’re doing everything we can.

Quite an elaborate system has been created to avoid addressing the actual causes of homelessness. Amazingly enough, nowhere in this bureaucratic maze of governmental denial does a homeless person receive access to treatment, an adequate income or a home.

Market forces have prevailed, an industry has been born, and once again, poor people are to be blamed for poverty.

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

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WRITING FOR STREET PAPERS FOR OVER TWO DECADES

JACK BRAGEN

When I was young, in my 20s, I took pride in being able to get letters to the editor published. For a young adult with severe psychiatric illness, a letter to the editor in a paper is pretty good, but I wanted more. I really wanted to become a writer. Occasionally I submitted stories to publications, and considering the level of the writing I produced back then, I stood little or no chance of getting something accepted.

I got married in my 30s. Often, I would drive my wife to places, and I would sit in the car and wait for her. At one point, my wife wanted to visit the animal shelter and spend time with the animals there.

The old animal shelter, probably built in the 1950s, in the Pacheco-Concord-Martinez area was a flat, plain-looking building on the same road as a wastewater treatment facility, which reminded me of a jail. Later I learned from a television news story that the animal shelter was a repurposed detention center.

My wife had some works published in Street Spirit, an East Bay-based street newspaper, and I envied her for that. But while I sat in the car in the parking lot of the now torn-down animal shelter, an idea sparked in my mind for a personal essay about it, a personal essay. Because the animal shelter resembled a detention center, and I've been jailed before, I was inspired to write that story.

In 2001, I was finally a published

author.

The street papers, for many years, have provided me with a unique opportunity that would be impossible to find elsewhere. If I was Joe Coffee Bean, with no disability, and worked as a Starbuck's manager, nonetheless, if I had writing aspirations, Street Papers would not be an opportunity.

As good as my writing is, there must be some kind of angle to be published with a newspaper or magazine. Mine with street papers is that I live with a severe disability, and I am poor as dirt. And I truly appreciate street papers like Street Sheet, which gave me a chance.

The street papers give me a voice, and I can talk about the hardships of being mentally ill and for the most part of being unable to work a conventional job. And I can talk of people more unfortunate than me. And I can voice my outrage about how badly mentally ill people are dealt with.

At one point, I was at a Starbuck's when my wife shopped nearby, and a homeless man with a bicycle was present. I ended up sharing an outdoor table with him. He didn't know that I was listening closely and thinking of getting a story about him. I didn't tell him because I feared he would be offended. He believed I was just some guy willing to talk to him. He asked for one of my cigarettes, and I was happy to part with it. This became an article that the Street Spirit editor titled: "Coffee and Conversation with a Homeless

Man."

In the 1990s, I was friends with a woman who lived in her van. I allowed her to sleep in my apartment. She said she appreciated the "hands off" approach. Do unhoused women routinely get propositioned for sex in exchange for a place to sleep? Apparently so, but that's too big a question to talk about in this article. But I appreciated hearing that, because she was telling me that I had done something right.

Her name was Suzanne. She encouraged me to write and identify myself as a writer. I was 30 years old and had not yet been published. She had a pre-teen daughter who by now is probably in her thirties if not older.

Later I had a falling-out with Suzanne. But that doesn't erase the positive interactions that existed earlier.

Last year, when the Street Spirit lost its funding, its director did a huge favor and got me in with Street Sheet in San Francisco. I am a newcomer to Street Sheet. But I get paid a little bit, and this matters for numerous reasons. Yet if this kind of newspaper wasn't a special situation of being written by and for homeless and disadvantaged people, throngs of aspiring authors would be trying to get work into the paper, and the paper would not bother to pay the authors.

But also, to function and bring

in readers, a newspaper or magazine has to have something going for it. By paying the authors, the Street Sheet has a method of securing work from talented writers who consistently send good work.

When someone is living in the margins, being published matters. A lot. It brings a compensatory factor to a life that might otherwise seem pitiful. And being paid for my work matters. A lot.

In 1989, my psychiatric condition was worsening. Part of this was caused by situations of literal hard knocks. Additionally, I was burning out from working at jobs while taking high dosages of antipsychotics—a monumental effort.

I never would have guessed 35 years ago that a street paper, Street Sheet, would be founded, and that at age 60, I would be a frequent contributor.

I have to thank the many who have helped me. Street papers for me have been a beacon of hope and an activity that keeps me out of trouble. And because of the rigors of the work, my writing level is improving, which I hope will increase my prospects in the future.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California. In addition to contributing pieces to Street Sheet and Street Spirit, he is also the author of *Instructions for Dealing with Schizophrenia: A Self-Help Manual and other books.*

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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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Street Sheet Poetry Edition

Deadline extended

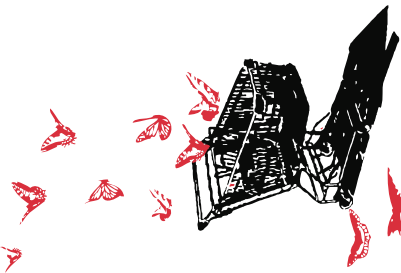
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