Building Home in 2018

Last year we celebrated 30 years since a small team of homeless folks, scruffy activists, and people working in shelters banded together to form the Coalition on Homelessness. Our work remains critical, trying, multifaceted, and punctuated by shining victories. We hold true to our vision of a city where housing is a human right, where homelessness is only ever temporary and dignified, and where those forced to remain on the streets are treated with compassion and respect. We are incredibly proud to have initiated and passed Prop C “Our City, Our Home” this year, which will transform both the lives of thousands of our poorest residents and our city. This was made possible through decades of principled and tireless work by the Coalition on Homelessness and our broad family of like-minded San Franciscans. San Franciscans who know that to be a San Franciscan means to take care of our own.

We are all San Franciscans. The lack of safe, affordable housing will not be solved by criminalizing poor and homeless people. It will be solved by investing in solutions.

2018 AT A GLANCE

• Wrote, sponsored and led a campaign to pass the historic Proposition C, which will house 4,000 households, treat 4,500 individuals, stave off displacement for 7,000 households a year and eliminate the shelter waiting list.
• Simplified the access process for family shelter, eliminating hurdles that were disenfranchising vulnerable families.
• Won over 360 housing subsidies for homeless youth, families, seniors, and people with disabilities.
• Successfully pushed the city to backfill employment services and mental health services for homeless youth, families, and single adults.
• Helped implement a simplified method for homeless people to address quality of life infractions, and helped get the city attorney to halt prosecuting homeless people for misdemeanor sleeping charges.
• Collected written declarations and video testimonies evidencing property confiscation policy violations by the city, leading the city to train DPW workers on the policy.
• Regularly brought policymakers (department heads, elected representatives, and candidates) to listen directly to the experiences of homeless people.
  • Initiated a cashless payment process so that customers can pay for the Street Sheet digitally and opened up a new, accessible distribution center for our Street Sheet vendors to collect their papers.
HOUSING JUSTICE

Through the budget process this year we were able to secure short term subsidies for over 280 homeless youth. We also secured 75 long term subsidies for seniors and people with disabilities, as well as fully-funded subsidies for families. A huge win was funding “Right to Counsel” (Prop F) in San Francisco, providing funding for additional attorneys for hundreds of San Franciscans facing eviction. We successfully pushed the city to backfill employment services and mental health services for youth and families. We simplified the access process for family shelter, eliminating multiple hurdles that were further disenfranchising vulnerable families.

HUMAN RIGHTS

A key part of our work this year has been bringing policymakers and people experiencing homelessness into regular contact with each other. Several district supervisors and candidates have come out to encampments to learn about the needs of encampment residents. We have had regular meetings with the Director of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. We’re bringing a legal challenge around property confiscation to DPW and SFPD, with written declarations and video testimonies evidencing policy violations by the city, and the work has already led to training by DPW of workers on property confiscation policy. We’ve made incredible strides regarding fines and fees; working with the city Treasurer to implement a number of reforms including a simplified process to address homeless citations, working with BART and SFMTA to ensure simplified access to community service as an alternative to paying fines, and more. We also learned on outreach that the District Attorney was prosecuting misdemeanor lodging charges and our pressure led to the halting of that practice. We established permanent low-income guidelines for MTA citations. We are working with community partners to roll out a wraparound citation defense program that will alleviate the financial burden on poor and homeless San Franciscans.

STREET SHEET

We are so proud of the incredible work that our new Editor, Quiver Watts, is bringing to the Street Sheet. We produced a bi-monthly paper, written primarily by people with lived homeless experience, and sold by low-income vendors who keep 100% of the proceeds. This past year they collaborated with HealthRIGHT360 to open up a new accessible distribution center for vendors. Another exciting development is our cashless payment system, which responds to the needs of our vendors in an increasingly cashless society. Quiver is proud to have published a Social Justice Calendar & Shelter Waitlist Update in every issue this year. Quiver’s hard work has been supplemented by our incredible Vendor Coordinator, Emmet House, who stepped up to the position this year.

DIGNIFIED SHELTER AND HYGIENE ACCESS 2018

We fought hard to ensure the fundamental needs of homeless people were met. We successfully fought for and won funding for two replacement shelters; one shelter in the Bayview and another one for families that currently have only mats on the floor, are closed during the day and have no or severely limited shower access. In addition, we campaigned for and won funding for additional portable bathrooms that will now serve an additional 300 homeless people per day. In addition, we implemented restorative justice practices in several shelters, and hosted restorative circles at times of conflict.
CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Social change can only be realized when the right conditions are in place. Conditions that are seeded and grown over time through the hard work of community organizing. It took decades of work around homelessness in San Francisco to create the conditions for lasting change that Proposition C represents. Decades of leadership work, developing strong alliances with other community organizations and labor unions, protesting, developing policy, engaging in tireless media work and pushing for legal action. This work effectively pushed back against the dehumanization of a population and their use as political wedges by hateful forces, while we countered with messages of hope and possibility. The occupy movement started camping out, and many homeless people joined them, and after housed movement members took down their tents, homeless people kept theirs up. This lent a visibility to the homeless crisis that did not exist previously. In the case of Prop. C: mass displacement meant everyday San Franciscans were relating to homeless people for the first time in decades. They saw themselves—precarious, threatened—in the faces of homeless people. Meanwhile, a court ruling opened up the opportunity to pass Prop. C with a simple majority, rather than two-thirds. While this was being challenged, and our own measure would be challenged if we only got a majority of support instead of two-thirds, it was still worth trying, because the likelihood of success in the courtroom was high. We also needed to make sure there were not a lot of competing measures on the ballot—this had hurt us in the past. We were able to convince our allies to get behind our measure instead of offering a competing revenue measure. They agreed. This was our moment. Learning from the past losses of politically driven measures, we crafted a measure that was big and bold, with an income source that draws only from those who could afford to pay.

SETTING OUR COLLECTIVE GOALS

Over the course of ten months, we gathered data, solicited input, held presentations, conducted a poll, and, finally, hired lawyers to draft a measure. We went through dozens of drafts, soliciting and including input from hundreds of policy makers, elected officials, homeless people, front-line service providers, business leaders, department heads, and every major mayoral candidate. We had inclusive meetings that all stakeholders were invited to attend and honed the language until we were collectively satisfied with the results. We had some basic considerations: The initiative needed to be big and to take a massive bite out of homelessness. We wanted to go upstream and ensure we kept San Franciscans in their homes. We wanted children and young people to have the housing they need to prevent a whole new generation of homelessness. We wanted the measure to be holistic, and to address the issue from all sides. After careful consideration we decided to name the measure “Our City, Our Home”. The name was chosen to embrace San Francisco’s civic pride, inclusiveness, and housing as a human right.
We invited three amazing women to be our proponents; Jacquelynne Evans, a community leader and recently homeless mother; Christin Evans, small business owner and president of Haight Merchants Association; and Lauren Hall, Co-Director of DISH, a supportive housing organization. We submitted “Our City, Our Home” for title and summary and started gathering signatures. We were nervous and recognized that gathering the required nine thousand signatures was a huge undertaking. Along the way we amassed over seven hundred volunteer signature gatherers. It turned out we didn’t need to be nervous. We gathered a whopping (and potentially record breaking) twenty-nine thousand signatures which catapulted us over the finish line. We were on the ballot!

We were riding high on a wave of people power moving into the last few weeks of the campaign. The campaign caught fire, a movement was birthed, it felt good, and we’d amassed endorsements from a broad array of individuals, organizations, and businesses. Organizations who had traditionally been at odds with each other all came on board, from groups like SPUR, Council of Community Housing Organizations, Harvey Milk Democratic Party, Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club and Coalition of San Francisco Neighborhoods. We gathered together ballot arguments from diverse San Franciscans and a host of elected leaders. We had raised about $450,000.00 from a variety of donors including community activists, tech workers, unions, community organizations and more. We started a strong field campaign early—walking districts and making calls. We had successful Chinese and Spanish components and won a ton of earned media. People were feeling it. The campaign spoke to the deep, ongoing struggle for equity that San Franciscans are critically aware of. One month prior to the vote, Mayor Breed came out against the measure. A day following the Mayor’s announcement, Salesforce Co-CEO Marc Benioff came out in favor of Prop. C.

The last month was a whirlwind, and took an interesting turn. With CEO Benioff on board and actively tweeting, international attention turned to our race. We garnered the endorsements of big names before Benioff came on board, like Congresswomen Nancy Pelosi and Jackie Speier. We then got Dianne Feinstein and support just kept rolling in. With additional resources were were able to hire 120 homeless people to rapidly make phone calls to voters, we had a robust advertising budget on cable, broadcast and digital media. We did innovative things, like skywriting and digital moving billboards. The people power was enormous, and combined with what usually only happens in well-funded conservative campaigns, we were able to have a powerful combination of people power and advertising. We now had victory within our reach.

On election night San Francisco turned out to the polls to voice strong support for this measure and for an end to homelessness. We now face the work of making sure our vision is implemented in a way that is centered on the experience and needs of homeless people, and is data driven to ensure best results. We will spend the next few months outreaching to potential applicants of the oversight body, collecting data from homeless people directly on how best to use these funds and getting everything in place to make sure that when the funds are released they make the biggest difference possible in the most efficient way. We want to make sure that at that moment, every project is designed and shovel ready. Lives will be transformed by the opportunities that only a home can bring.
SPREAD THE WORD:
Keep up to date with homeless issues and policy in San Francisco by purchasing the Street Sheet and visiting streetsheet.org. Educate your friends, family, and coworkers on poverty issues in San Francisco. You can also sign up for our action alerts online at www.cohsf.org. Host a Homeless Speakers Bureau at your birthday, community event, or house party. All proceeds benefit the speakers. Contact development@cohsf.org for details.

BE ON THE FRONT LINES:
We always need people to join with our campaigns, to support our Sweeps Watch program, to conduct outreach, to contribute content to the Street Sheet, or to help out in a variety of ways in the office. You can also join one of the weekly workgroups at our office at 468 Turk Street:
Housing Justice meets on Tuesdays at 12:00pm
Human Rights meets on Wednesdays at 12:30pm

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF RESOURCES FOR THE RICH. LET’S MAKE SURE EVERYONE’S BASIC NEEDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MET.
The bulk of our Housing Justice work in 2019 will be overseeing the successful implementation of Prop C. The measure will particularly impact youth and family homelessness, and we will ensure that the decision-making teams for this implementation include formerly homeless youth and families. We will partner with universities and foundations to do extensive research driven by the experience of homeless people themselves, that will set the stage for successful implementation. We will continue to oversee the opening of new and dignified full-service family shelters for underserved communities, and we will be building on our restorative practices work in the shelter system.

HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2019 we’ll support the creation of the city’s first safe parking program for the vehicularly housed. At the same time, we’ll be pushing for legislative reform to protect all San Franciscans that are forced to live in their vehicles. We will be building on the ninth circuit ruling that municipalities shall not criminalize people living on the streets when there are not adequate services available, and we will continue to work to decrease criminalization and to implement humane processes to address encampments. A recent UN Report scathingly undermined San Francisco’s criminalization of its homeless population, and we will be drawing attention to this as we continue to push for “Right to Rest” policies.

STREET SHEET

We will continue to put out a vibrant and informed newspaper that comes directly from the voices of the homeless community. We are very excited about the Street Sheet Podcast, which we will be launching in the Spring. Not only will this make the stories in the newspaper accessible to new audiences, it will provide another opportunity to train vendors in public speaking. Next year the Street Sheet will be fully implementing our cashless payment system, enabling vendors to receive payments digitally for the first time. Our accessible distribution center will be operating at full speed. We are proactively responding to the needs of our vendors!