THIS IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE
DEFEND OUR COMMUNITY
AGAINST COVID -19
HOUSING IS HEALTHCARE

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS
ANNUAL REPORT 2020
FOR MANY OF US, 2020 IS A YEAR WE WANT TO FORGET. Between COVID-19, police murders and climate change-induced wildfires, unhoused residents of San Francisco have felt the brunt of this turmoil. Unhoused folks are more likely to be negatively affected by poor air quality, have nowhere to shelter in place to keep themselves and their communities safe, and of course have a much higher likelihood of interacting with police officers, and all that can mean given they are constantly in public space where the primary response to homelessness is policing.

However, we have deep pride in the reality that we have risen as an organization to meet these challenges side by side with our unhoused members and front-line service providers in swift and often miraculous ways. In this report, we are proud to share how we have transformed adversity into opportunity, torn down barriers to systemic change and shepherded our struggle to end mass homelessness once and for all in San Francisco towards a resolution of historic gains.

Please enjoy this annual report as much as we have enjoyed doing the work to elevate the voices of unhoused people, build power and effect tangible change for the over 20,000 San Franciscans who find themselves without a safe and decent place to call home each year.
Released a peer-based needs assessment that gathered data from the experts — unhoused people themselves — to craft a vision of a new homeless system centered on their lived experience. This groundbreaking report is entitled “Stop the Revolving Door.”

Our Housing Justice team started the year by pushing the City to broaden its definition of family homelessness, to include all homeless families. The group went on to win funding for over 400 housing subsidies, staved off shelter closures and helped win a new shelter for transgender community, job training funding and homelessness prevention.

On the heels of that victory, our two-year legal battle to release homeless funds came to a startling early end and over $400 million was released to craft exits off the streets for the growing homeless population. We are working hard to ensure that every penny of that funding is used to create systemic change.

In response to COVID-19, we carried out a successful campaign to expand hotel rooms for unhoused people. This pressure helped lead to over 2,500 hotel rooms. We also helped halt poverty tows, distributed tents, fought for sanitation access and were instrumental in increasing access to testing in the Tenderloin.

Launched an innovative podcast, Street Speak, answering your burning questions about poverty and homelessness and expanding our efforts to bring you news directly from those most impacted.
When the pandemic hit in March, just about everything changed for unhoused San Franciscans. Shelters stopped taking reservations and many closed after breakouts occurred in large congregate spaces. The fundamental services unhoused residents rely on — cafes, libraries, drop in centers — disappeared; that meant nowhere to charge a phone, use a restroom or refill a water bottle. Staying with family members was no longer possible. As a result, many people lost jobs and housing. In the words of one unhoused man we met on outreach, “The City has left us here to die.” The situation was desperate.

This meant the Coalition on Homelessness had to change, too. With a nimbleness unheard of in most organizations we quickly shifted our work plan, set up daily calls, gathered information and got to work at breakneck speed to respond to the crisis. We worked on making sure unhoused people had access to testing, we fought hard for hotel rooms, and we pushed back against the City to make sure those on the streets could shelter in place, and that the City didn’t sweep people away and confiscate their tents, thus creating contact tracing nightmares. We quickly formed an outreach team to keep our ears to the ground to track the constantly changing environment, and we developed and strengthened allegiances with faith and medical groups. We also shifted our tactics by organizing several of the first car caravans. We distributed supplies that were critical to the survival of our neighbors — tents, water, masks and so much more. After fighting for hotel rooms, the City is now planning on shutting them down, and we will turn this tragedy into hope by organizing to make sure no one ends up back on the streets.
Back in 2018 we wrote, fought for, and won an initiative that has become a large part of our organization's legacy. Proposition C, dubbed “Our City, Our Home”, was simple; a one-half percent tax on corporate income over $50 million would more than double our city’s response to the humanitarian crisis of homelessness. Unhoused people were at the center of this campaign, and we hired over 300 unhoused people to call voters, while mobilizing alongside over 700 volunteers knocking on doors across the city. Since then, the initiative had held up in court. But finally in September, the California Supreme Court rejected the case, making our win at the appeals court final. We won! This means over $400 million has been released to provide housing, treatment, prevention and emergency services to our unhoused neighbors. But our work is nowhere near over — we now need to make sure the funds are used effectively.

The initiative is structured to have an oversight body that makes recommendations on how the funds should be spent. We are committed to ensuring those decisions are centered on the experiences of unhoused people. To help make that happen, we spent the last year surveying homeless people in collaboration with four different universities, focusing on the interventions funded by Prop. C — housing, treatment, prevention and shelter. We engaged in community-based Participatory Action Research in which people with lived experience of homelessness direct and guide the research as paid peer survey proctors. The peer researchers’ lived expertise through homelessness, combined with technical advice from social scientists on survey design and data analysis, produced our report which ensure the findings direct decisions about homelessness funding under Prop. C.

This was another banner year for our unique and hard-hitting newspaper Street Sheet. The paper had the dual distinction of being both the longest continuously running street paper, but also the largest circulation. It is sold by poor and homeless vendors who keep 100% of the profits, and is written primarily by those with lived experience with homelessness and their advocates. The paper combines journalism with poetry and artwork to ensure readers can hear directly the word on the street. This past year, we were able to begin paying poor and homeless writers for their journalism, allowing us to build the skills of our contributors and compensate them. We also debuted Street Speak, our new podcast, answering your burning questions about poverty and homeless. When COVID-19 hit, our vendors lost access to funds they needed to pay rent, purchase food and other survival needs. We quickly created a vendor relief fund and distributed thousands directly to our vendors to support them through this time. The paper is back in production and continuing to grow readership!
The Housing Justice workgroup is one of two core working groups we have at the Coalition on Homelessness. It is staffed by and made up of 100% people of color with lived experience of homelessness. The group, utilizing our organization’s unique community organizing model conducts extensive outreach to shelters, families in hotel rooms, playgrounds and drop-in centers to build our base and build power for unhoused people and then comes together once a week to carry out campaigns that line up with what we are seeing on the streets. They focus in particular on families with children as a population that has been severely underserved and made up almost extensively of people of color. It was this group where the idea for Prop. C was born. Each year, the group carries out a powerful budget campaign to ensure wasteful City dollars are redirected towards the creation of solutions to homelessness, and many of the highlights you see in 2020 are the direct result of their work. This entails a lot of work conducting research, gathering input from members, developing alliances with other organizations, carrying out creative direct actions, organizing meetings with City officials and unhoused residents, and so much more. Most recently, the groups held a direct action in front of City Hall, where under other organizations, carrying out creative direct actions, organizing meetings with City officials and unhoused work. This entails a lot of work conducting research, gathering input from members, developing alliances with other organizations, carrying out creative direct actions, organizing meetings with City officials and unhoused residents, and so much more. Most recently, the groups held a direct action in front of City Hall, where under COVID-19, more than 300 folks could safely participate by ringing a bell for housing and keeping social distance, of course. They also have been focusing as well on housing equity — ensuring racial equity and access to affordable housing, and also the disproportionate number of evictions in the African American community.

Our Human Rights workgroup brings together like-minded San Francisco allies with unhoused residents through organizing to ensure fundamental civil and human rights are protected. They build power through conducting extensive outreach to unhoused people in tents, sleeping rough and in vehicles. This past year, they convened several campaigns including Our Wheels, Our Homes, Solutions not Sweeps and Stolen Belonging. Each of these campaigns used creative means to halt and to draw attention to the plight of those forced to sleep on the streets, and the practice of the City to tow, remove, harass and confiscate property as an unwritten policy to “manage” the homeless crisis. Human Rights serves as both a defense — often fighting back in the moment as the City carries out these plans while playing offense — and working to dismantle these practices to keep this from happening in the first place. An example of defense is responding immediately to sweeps, documenting them and often stopping them in their tracks. An example of offense is our work to change the dispatch protocol so that the Police and Public Works departments are no longer sent out, but the creation of a team that responds and works to move people off the street. This started with getting a resolution passed at the Police Commission and grew into an effort with over 50 people involved from City government, community-based organizations and with lived experience of homelessness. Another example is our work to intervene in the UC Hastings lawsuit, which called for a removal of tents in the Tenderloin; we legally intervened to move that effort instead to ensure folks were offered hotel rooms.
We have an ambitious agenda for next year. We must. This year we lost so many beloved community members as the City failed to protect homeless people from COVID-19. As case numbers continue to surge, we must continue to fight for the living and organize to win concrete changes for unhoused San Franciscans. In 2021, we will use every tool in our toolbox to build power — legal action, creative protest, facilitating access to public officials for unhoused organizers, research, writing legislation, putting out our own hard hitting news and so much more.

None of this will be possible without the leadership and expertise of unhoused residents themselves. In the coming year we will be doubling down on our efforts to ensure that homeless leaders are at the center of our work, that we continue to do extensive outreach to get their input on our campaigns, and that we develop alliances with other organizations who are committed to seeing an end to this humanitarian crisis.

**VISIONING FOR 2021**

**HOUSING JUSTICE**
+ We will fight to ensure that the City doesn’t push the 2,500 vulnerable people currently in shelter-in-place hotel rooms back out onto the streets, but instead ensures that each person exits into safe and permanent housing  
+ We will work to make sure that the funds finally released for Prop. C are used in accordance with the recommendations formulated by the unhoused people whose priorities we documented in “Stop the Revolving Door”  
+ Through community organizing, utilizing media, organizing hearings, and other creative tactics, we will elevate the voices of unhoused households who want the City to fund subsidies to be used in now-vacant apartments, purchase tourist hotels and convert rooms into efficiency studios, purchase board and cares homes as well as cooperative housing for folks with mental health challenges, and dramatically increase treatment capacity in creative ways

**HUMAN RIGHTS**
+ For the many thousands who remain stuck on the streets, the situation continues to be dire as the basic international human rights standards with regards to sanitation continue to be unmet by City leaders. We are launching a campaign to demand permanent water stations where people can drink and fill their water containers, and ensure that all San Franciscans can access this life source  
+ We will continue working with our allies to ensure that the halt to poverty tows continues after the pandemic is over, so that vehicularly housed people can have a modicum of stability and safety as we work to expand access to housing  
+ In the coming year, we will continue with our ongoing work to design an alternative to a police response to homelessness. Our goal is to ensure that instead of using extensive City resources to push unhoused people from corner to corner and to cruelly and illegally confiscate their property, the City will redirect this funding to services and housing.

We are an independent, grassroots non-profit organization that does not accept ANY government funding. We are a 501(c)3 and your donation is tax deductible. All donations sustain our tireless work eliminating poverty and homelessness in San Francisco. Thank you!