

Building Power & Fighting Back

In 2014, as the housing crisis drove so many San Franciscans out of their homes, and the forces of inequity attacked homeless people, the Coalition on Homelessness

built our power and fought back. We built bridges toward social change—large and small, assiduously wonky and wonderfully creative.

Recyclers were under attack. Homeless people had their sleeping areas hosed down. BART police illegally arrested people for nothing more than sleeping. The City forced new rules upon shelters that challenged the dignity of residents. Homeless people got the squeeze from every direction. We not only beat back those mean-spirited efforts, but we worked tirelessly to keep San Franciscans housed and to house San Franciscans.

2014 at a Glance

We Kept San Franciscans Housed

Our member families and homeless individuals, working with allied organizations, got the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor to award \$2,000,000 in funds for a strategic response to the eviction crisis. The funds will be used for full-scope eviction defense, back rent, and rental assistance, preventing displacement for more than 2,000 households.

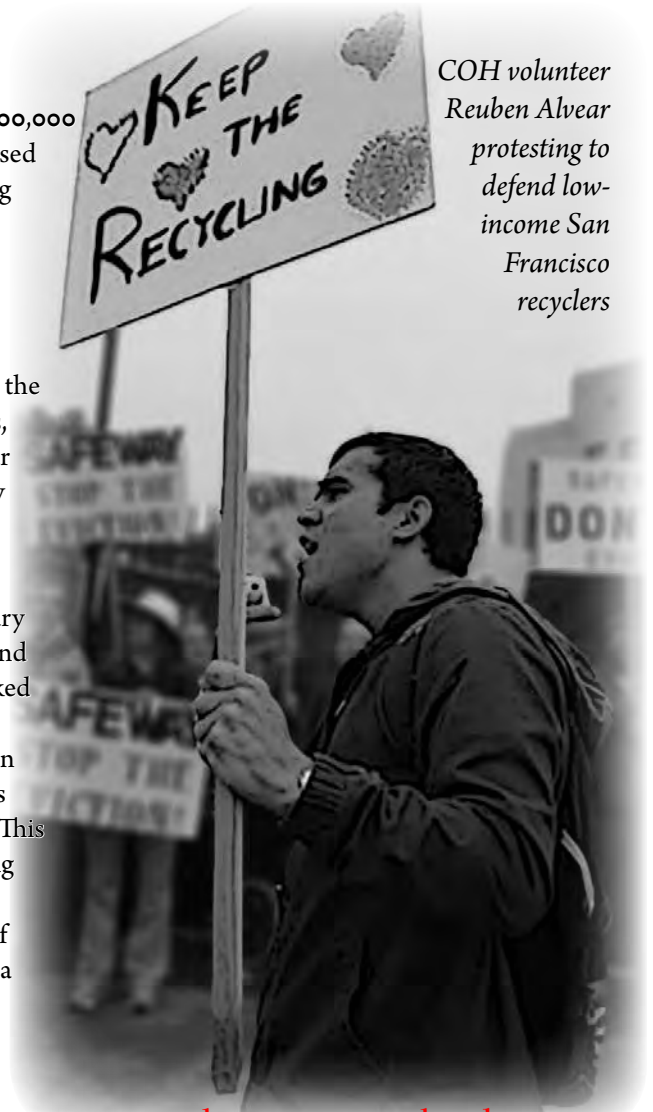
We Developed New Leaders

We sponsored a nine-week Free School where homeless and low-income members of the Coalition learned core community organizing skills including meeting facilitation, campaign planning, conflict de-escalation, the San Francisco legislative process, City budget mechanics, affordable housing policy, street outreach, and more. Our members then got experience putting to work what they learned in our campaigns for justice.


We Shared Our Love for Recyclers

Bowing to the public pressure of developers of luxury housing, San Francisco lost several working and potential recycling centers in 2014. We worked hard to draw attention to the need for and needs of the many impoverished San Franciscans who redeem their cans and bottles for hard earned cash. This will inhibit the city from reaching its zero waste goals. As a result, the San Francisco Department of Environment will be developing a plan to address the severe lack of recycling centers.

COH volunteer
Reuben Alvear
protesting to
defend low-
income San
Francisco
recyclers



*“Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar.
Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.”
—Gloria Anzaldúa*



“I’m fighting for help and the right support for me and my daughter to be better people and to find better support for everyone else that needs it.”
—Darline Benavides

We Worked Toward a Right to Rest

Deep in the summer months, the BART police started illegally citing and arresting homeless people who were sleeping in their stations. While people were tucked up against the walls, not blocking anyone, BART cited obstruction and building code laws, gave out tickets and then jailed people for the second offense. We have been working hard to halt this process, bringing in legal assistance, and conducting direct action to halt the practice. Simultaneously, we have significantly built up support for our campaign for a Right to Rest in California and we are working with our ally organizations to get that passed next year.

We Documented Human Rights Abuses

We released a report on the increasing harassment of homeless people and people of color in the 16th and Mission BART Plaza. We are now conducting citywide research on the criminalization and displacement of homeless people in San Francisco. This report will be released in 2015, and will draw attention to the need for a state wide law that ensures every human has a right to rest.

We Fought for Dignified Mental Health Treatment

Mental health consumers—who already have to face a severely under-funded treatment system—faced a new threat to their rights this past year. Laura’s Law was introduced at the Board of Supervisors, which allows family members, and police to pull consumers into court in order to compel them into treatment. While the ordinance eventually passed, we removed its sharpest teeth, banning handcuffed transports to court and assessments in locked facilities unless danger is present. We also ensured that consumers’ voices had institutional strength in the process.

We Housed San Franciscans

Our homeless members and our community allies worked tirelessly on a creative campaign that drew attention to the real life impact of homelessness on men, woman, and children. As a result we won a campaign to create **132 housing subsidies for homeless families with children, and elderly and disabled adults**. This subsidy can be used to keep people housed who would otherwise become homeless, and to help people who are currently homeless to obtain housing.

Through a successful six-month budget campaign, we were able to secure \$2.7 million from the Mayor to fix up just under 200 vacant public housing units and turn them over to homeless people. Part of our strategy is to get the waitlist open, and to prioritize homeless people on the wait list. We now have agreements from the SF Housing Authority to do both of these things.

We Worked Toward a Real Crisis Intervention Team

As police are often the first to arrive on the scene when an individual is in psychiatric crisis, and **over half of all police shootings involve someone in psychiatric crisis**, we need institutional change. The Coalition, working with SFPD alongside members of the legal and mental health professions, has continued our quest for a Crisis Intervention Team in San Francisco. We made serious strides collectively, with the introduction of dispatch protocol for 9-1-1, and expanded and improved training for officers.

We Demanded Dignified Treatment in Public Institutions

When the SF Public Library targeted homeless people with new proposed rules and harsh sanctions, we quickly got to work to shift the debate into a conversation about how to transform the library into a more welcoming space for all people. We not only got major changes to the policy, but an agreement to create an appeals process. We are now training staff on how to work with homeless people, and better address problem behaviors.



“We struggle because we all need to live better.”

—Lidia Flores

Our Vision for 2015

“I love volunteering with the COH because we take a bottom-up approach to community organizing. The COH centers the voices of people who are being criminalized and displaced, and links their experiences to bigger processes happening in our city and our state.”

—Dilara Yarbrough



Building Power For Human Rights

The Human Rights Workgroup of the Coalition on Homelessness envisions a San Francisco in which poor and homeless people have the power to assert their universal human rights, and where dignity, respect, compassion, and equality are the standard of the community and the policy of the city.

In the midst of the housing crisis, poor people are getting hit from all sides—many are becoming homeless, and those who are homeless are facing unprecedented criminalization efforts and diminished resources. Thousands are on the streets in San Francisco, shelters are overflowing, while targeted enforcement and prosecution of homeless people are getting fiercer.

This past year, we saw proposed rules at libraries and public shelters that made it more difficult for homeless people to survive. We saw people arrested for simply sleeping. And still we saw an increase in people camping on our streets. Several recycling centers have been closed due to complaints of the very presence of poor people in their now upscale neighborhoods. Homeless people—be they mentally ill, hard working and/or disabled—have been under serious attack.

The Human Rights Workgroup employs a variety of tactics to reach its goals: creative direct actions, public hearings, media work, legal intervention—We have found that it takes the creative use of all the tools we can develop to move us toward our vision of a more just society.



Fighting for Housing Justice

The Coalition on Homelessness Housing Justice Workgroup is working for every woman, man, and child in San Francisco to have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, secure, and affordable housing.

With the severity of the current housing crisis, the skyrocketing rents, the unprecedented numbers of evictions, and the all but total cessation of new affordable housing opportunities, poor San Franciscans are facing hardships today that would have once been unimaginable.

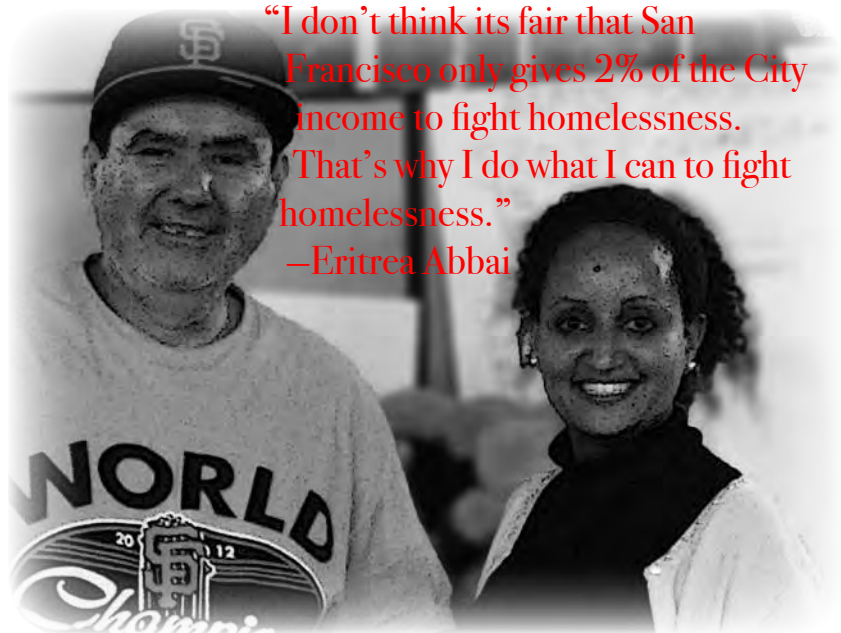
This powerful group made up entirely of homeless and formerly homeless parents and individuals, is:

- pushing the Housing Authority to turn its vacant units over to homeless folks,
- fighting for an increase in subsidies available to homeless families to exit homelessness,
- halting mean-spirited proposals coming from policy makers,
- ensuring that not one more preventable displacement of an impoverished San Franciscan take place, and
- advocating both for their own families, and for other marginalized people in their communities.

This past year, in work led by disenfranchised San Franciscans, we built housing justice for hundreds of households, working from raw people power.

“I don’t think its fair that San Francisco only gives 2% of the City income to fight homelessness. That’s why I do what I can to fight homelessness.”

—Eritrea Abbai



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STREET SHEET

25
years

PUBLISHED BY THE COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS SINCE 1989

THE WORD ON THE STREET

1989–2014

STREETSHEET.ORG

25 YEARS of SAN FRANCISCO'S STREET SHEET

On October 17, 1989, beneath the Santa Cruz Mountains, the San Andreas Fault slipped, sending a magnitude 6.9 seismic wave through San Francisco and most of the central Bay Area. Like the massive cuts to public housing that had ushered in the '80s, the Loma Prieta Earthquake closed out the decade by creating a massive new population of homeless people.

Since 1983—when the cuts to public housing had forced the opening of San Francisco's first homeless shelter—the City had partially addressed homelessness through a program that paid for-profit hotel owners an average of \$3 million per year to shelter homeless individuals for a maxi-

mum of one week at a time. But in the quake, 25% of these "Hotline Hotels" were destroyed or made uninhabitable. In response, the Department of Social Services (DSS) decided to phase out the Hotline Hotel system.

It was in this context that volunteers at the Coalition on Homelessness issued the organization's first newsletter. The first article addressed this phase-out: "...the first group of individuals affected by these dangers spent their final day in Hotline with the following results: of the approximately 114 people displaced on that day, 20 applied for GA [General Assistance: county cash

aid]. Of the 20, only one person was actually accepted. Twenty-five people have signed up for the GA Modified Payment Program and received more permanent housing. It seems that 88 people have fallen through the gaping holes in the safety net provided by the Department of Social Services, holes created by the department's renegeing on its initial promise to house undocumented individuals, and by the department's refusal to loosen in any way the current GA requirements.

"It is only as hard as you make it yourself. I am fighting for freedom and to feel safe. It is very important to be a vendor for the past 21 years and I was in the first article ever for Street Sheet which means a lot."

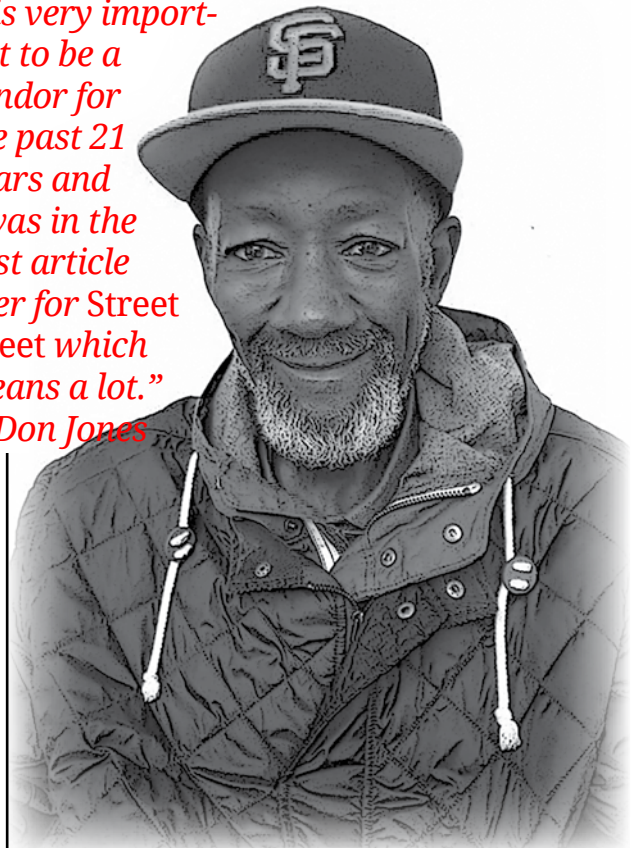
—Don Jones

Vendor Profile: Don James

"I'm native to San Francisco but since me and my fiancée separated, I landed in the Tenderloin. When I landed there, it was a new experience, but mostly a bad experience. I had to figure out a way to come up out of there. I had a couple jobs but when my son got killed, you know, it was a life changing experience. That's when I started doing this professionally, like a job, to not sleep on the street and take care of myself.

"This is my only income, so if I treat it as a job, I might get some positivity out of it, which I have. It makes my life a lot easier. I use this as income to keep a place to stay out of the Tenderloin.

"I conduct myself professionally, I treat everyone nice and respectfully. If I'm not there, people ask me, "Where were you?" That's a good feeling, you know, to know that people care. And there are a lot of compassionate people that care about me genuinely and I really respect and admire that."



“In light of the current progress of the plan, one would have to wonder: is DSS planning a phase-out or a bailout of the Hotline system? Are they planning to help people out of the homeless cycle, or simply help them out of town?”

We weren’t pulling any punches.

The work of the Coalition led, the following month, to the reallocation of one quarter of the Hotline budget to support a new agency that the Coalition was fundamental in creating: the Community Housing Partnership. To this day, CHP is the number one provider of housing for formerly homeless people in San Francisco.

Through the *Street Sheet*, we had created an effective tool to disseminate important information about homeless policy to our people: homeless people, front-line service providers, and advocates.

With the February 1990 issue, we printed our first art (a print by **1990** Eliza Miller and a drawing by Jane “in vain”—the latter of whom continued to print new art in the *Street Sheet* through 2009). Powerful artwork created by homeless people became a core part of the publication, with cartoons, prints, and graphs

exploding over the next several months. The first photograph would not be run until a year later, in February of 1991, when, like proud parents, we sent out to the world a photo of CHP’s San Cristina Hotel—its first residence for homeless people.

In August 1990, the *Street Sheet* first experimented with another tool for communication, publishing a poem entitled “Toastin’ Marshmallows of the Mind” by Biro. Poetry remains essential to the educational work that the *Street Sheet* does, and is one of its more popular features: The annual poetry issue is always one of our best-sellers.

Through our art, through our poetry, and through some of the only real journalism about homelessness that was being done anywhere, the paper had become much more than the newsletter that its masthead still proclaimed. But our distribution remained limited to our core organizing and advocacy community.

In the same month as Loma Prieta, Phil Collins released one of very few pop songs the Anglophone world has ever heard about homelessness, “Another Day in Paradise.” In December, the single reached number one in the US, and

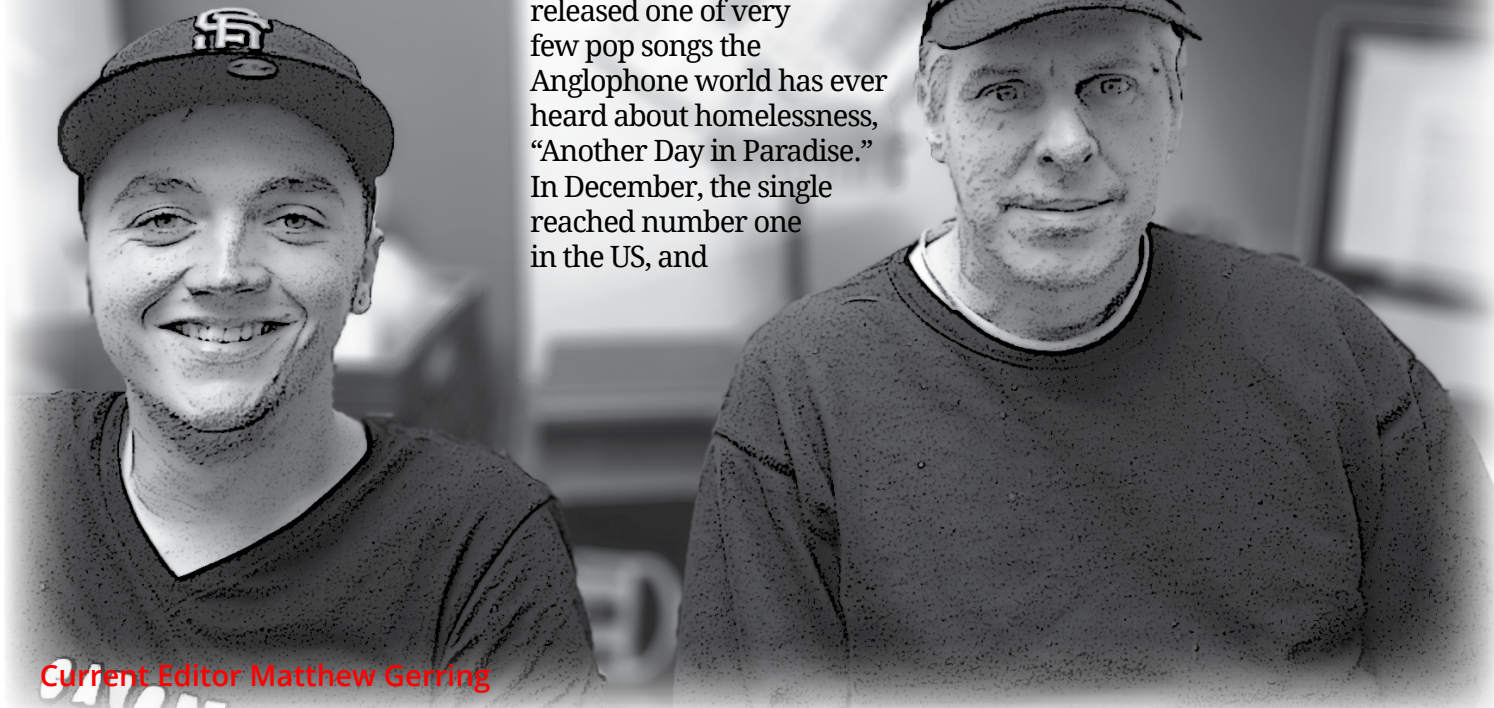
spurred sales of the album ...*But Seriously*, and the ensuing Seriously Live! tour. Seriously Live! hit the Shoreline Amphitheatre in September of 1990, and Collins invited the Coalition on Homelessness to table. As an educational tool, we printed 20,000 copies of a tabloid format “Highlights of 1990” issue.

This ended up being several thousand copies too many. After the show, we gave them away to volunteers and panhandlers who discovered that the people of San Francisco at large were somewhat more voracious readers than were Phil Collins’ fans: The *Street Sheet* could be sold for a dollar!

The next month, we produced a regular tabloid-format *Street Sheet* newspaper—newsletter no more.

“My role in the struggle is to get the truth about homelessness out in the Street Sheet. There is a lot of misinformation and dis-information that is put out by the mainstream media and the political establishment. This results in myths that are damaging to homeless people.”

—T.J. Johnston



Current Editor Matthew Gerring

Vendor Profile: Charles Sperling

"I was born and raised in Knoxville Tennessee. I went to school to the age of 16, and then I didn't want to go to school anymore, because I thought I was smarter. So one day I saw a man walking down the hallway, dressed in a blue suit with a white hat, and I thought, 'Wow, I can get a lot of babes with a suit like that,' because you know, I didn't grow up rich, I grew up kind of un-rich.

"The man said, "Would you like to join the Marines?"

"I never thought that I was educated enough to do anything like that, but two weeks later, I took the test without telling anybody. I thought I was going to fail the test. But I passed, and one day somebody knocked on the door real hard, and my mother opened the door and she said, "Who are you?"

"The man told her that he was from the US Marine Corps and that he was here for her son, so she turned to me, asking, "What did you do now?"

"But anyway, this was the proudest day of my life and I almost cried. My mom asked me if I really wanted this, and I told her that I needed this to change my life. She signed. That was the best thing she ever done to me in my entire life, and the best thing that I had ever done to myself.

"I ended up doing 10 years in there. But when I got in there I was in shock, because I was looking for the suit! They told me that it was going to take a long time for me to get a suit like that, and I called my mother crying but she told me to man up and stay out of trouble. When I got out of the Marine Corps I was in a lot of wars. I got hurt real bad, and when I got home, I thought life was going to be good to me, but I slept on the streets in New York and stayed there for 10 years.

"I got a job for the New York Post and got married. My wife died from cancer nine months later, and when she died, New York died. I moved to Miami and then to San Francisco, where I ended up in love again. We have been together 18 years now.

"Now I sell *Street Sheet* papers, and my whole life has changed. Selling the *Street Sheet* makes me feel important, because without the *Street Sheet* nobody knows what is going on. Some can go home where they got a TV and can have a shower and a bed to sleep in, but these people have nothing else than the clothes on their back. The people who need us to fight for them can't fight the world alone. I have been selling *Street Sheet* for 10 years now, and my heart is really into it."

EXCERPTS FROM THE STREET SHEET MANIFESTO

Who Are We?

We are a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness

We are an opinion tabloid

We are not a community paper

We have a narrow scope: homelessness and poverty

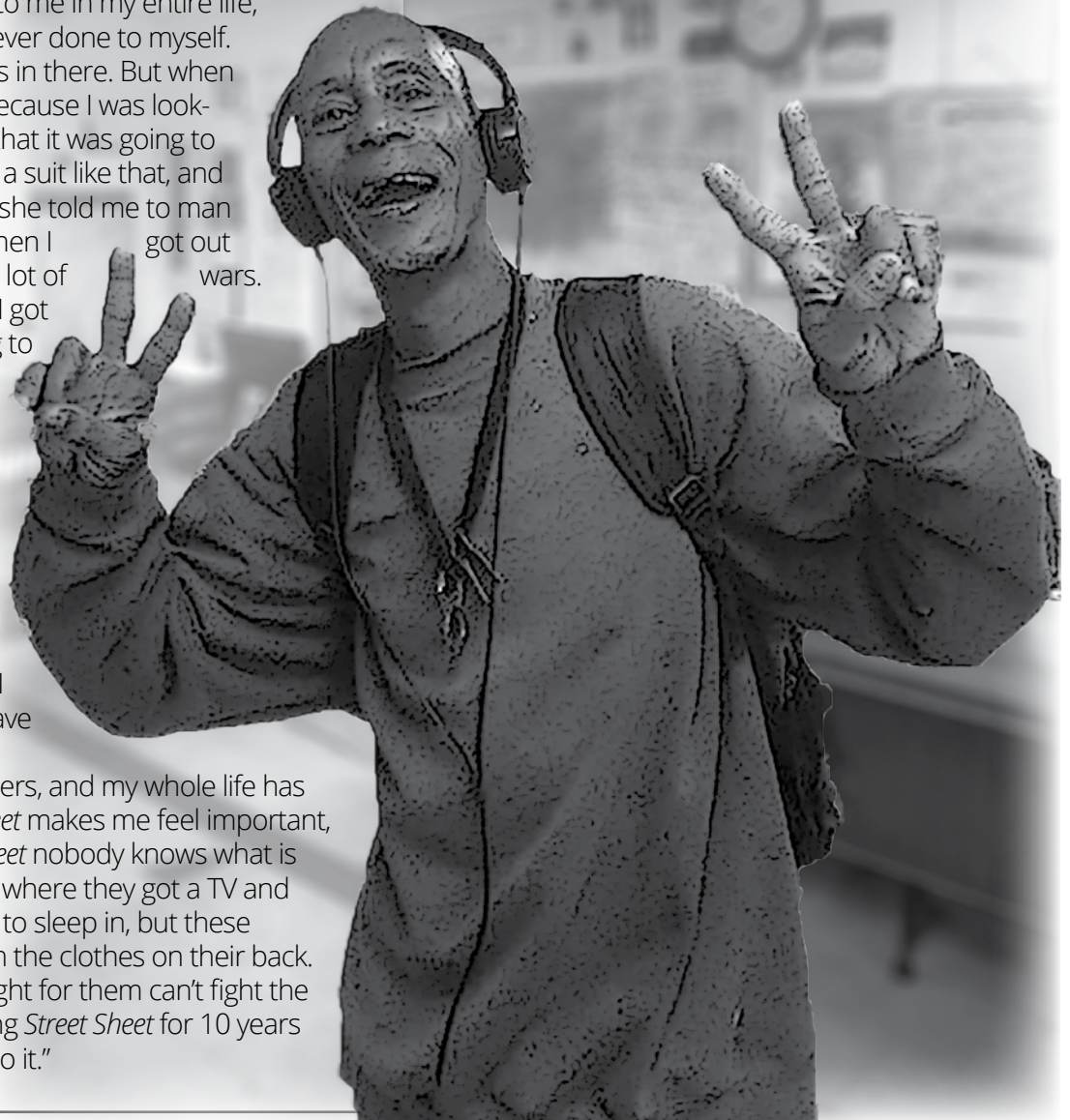
We do not address any issue just because its a lefty one

Less Grandiosity

We are righteous, but we are humble

We speak only for ourselves; no one has appointed us their spokesperson

We work hard, but we're not perfect



1991 We increased production from 1,700 to 30,000 papers a month.

The vendor program has become a parallel raison d'être for the *Street Sheet*: The paper educates the broader public about the realities of homelessness and homeless policy; it provides a forum for the voices of people who are excluded from mainstream press; and it provides a supplementary income for over 200 vendors each month.

We've done a lot since 1989: We've created millions of dollars **1993** of income opportunity for homeless people. Our millionth copy was in 1993; we've now distributed almost twelve million copies. We've run several writer workshops. We've printed beautiful full-color issues. In 2004, we were inducted into the Northern California Society of Professional Journalists. In 2009 we expanded production to twice monthly, ensuring that content was always relevant.

Perhaps the biggest change has been how widely our work has spread: There are now many voices of homelessness in the Bay Area—we work closely with *POOR Mag-*

azine and helped start up *Street Spirit* in the East Bay. And while we are the oldest living street paper in the country, we're now one among dozens of members of the North American Street Newspaper Association, which we helped found.

But our core remains the same. In 1997, founding editor Lydia Ely wrote a retrospective:

"What's changed in these eight years? Not a lot. We still tell it as it is. We're one of only a few papers that doesn't charge vendors for papers and that doesn't require vendors to wear badges, undergo training, or otherwise participate in another social service 'program.' We've gone this long without accepting advertising, we've kept our staffing and cost

needs down to next to nothing, and we're still not afraid to step on anyone's toes. We're proud to be here, proud of our voice, proud of our vendors—and we'll be around as long as there's homelessness."

This December, the *Street Sheet* will release our 25th anniversary edition with a fresh new look, while keeping our core identity.

Vendor Profile: Christoph Underwood

"My father's a career soldier. I was first born out of seven children in Nuremberg, Germany. My mother's German. We finally settled down at Fort Ord, and after my father got out of the service we lived in Seaside. And that's where I was raised, from seventh grade all the way up. But before that, we bounced around in different army bases around the States and in Germany.

"After I graduated from Monterey High I went into the army—I'm a Vietnam air veteran. I'm a paratrooper, 82nd Airborne jungle expert. I stayed in for a couple years, got out in '75, went to college and met my ex-wife at Monterey Peninsula College. We dated for a couple years and got married. Got married in '79, got divorced in '84 and decided to move to San Jose.

"I was a senior sales manager for 24 Hour Fitness back in their genesis, back when they first started. It was a new concept, being opened 24 hours a day and with the type of equipment and the huge aerobics floor, it was something new. No one had it. When I started with the company, I excelled and became a senior sales manager but I overworked myself. But I was top notch. I made good money, back in those days, back in the '80s. Bought me a condominium and everything, but I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take the rat race and I just got burnt out. I started using drugs and I got in trouble with the law a little bit, did my time, moved to San Francisco and I loved it here.

"When I got to San Francisco I worked at the airport, but my addiction really got the best of me so that's how I found myself starting to sell *Street Sheets*. I could set my own hours; it was a good way of making money.

"I'm on the mend now. I'm still struggling but I'm on the mend. I have aspirations to reintegrate myself back into the workforce because I have marketable skills. Once I find myself permanent, suitable housing for myself I think it will be so much easier. For me to have a place that I can call home sweet home and then go from there."

