

Broke-Ass Stuart, February 22, 2016

What Needs To Be Done About San Francisco's Tent City

[On-line version](#) and

[What to Do When a Person is Having a Mental Health Crisis On the Street](#)

Jennifer Friedenbach, Coalition on Homelessness

I met a woman the other day, one of the much maligned tent dwellers, and she told me how awful it is living outside. She is scared all the time, of course, us woman do like having our locked doors, and now she co-habitates with a male friend to keep her safe. She cleans hotels but doesn't make enough to afford housing. When I read the some of the recent media frenzy over the weekend; the string of privileged men calling out in awful ways – the **tech bro Justin** upset about having to see a homeless man outside a fancy restaurant, our former mayor **bragging about** spraying down homeless people with hoses, and a Chronicle columnist **consistently misinforming** the public about beds in shelters that are not available, I thought of her. I thought of how she told me how ashamed she is to be homeless and I thought how these articles must make her feel even worse. A string of men kicking her while she is down. There are all kinds of homeless people, they are not one monolithic class of people, but they do have a few things in common; they are too poor to afford a place to live, so the basic things like a good night's sleep, electricity, bathrooms, and showers are hard to come by.

Now many would wonder how we got to a place where the folks seeing homelessness are somehow the victims, as opposed to the people who seriously suffering on the streets. There are some serious issues that tent dwellers face, and that should never be ignored. In order to weed out the vitriol, it is important to simply lay out some basic solutions. Tents are a reality as long as we have no housing or shelter available, and frankly we don't have enough for everyone. (1300 shelter beds and just under 7,000 homeless people) Let's get real and solve this problem.

1. BASIC HYGEINE MATTERS

No one on the streets is asking for a right to use the sidewalk as a toilet. We have asked hundreds of homeless people this question and they want a dignified place to use the restroom. That should not be too much to ask for. Lets make sure tent campers have access to a restroom and showers. Portables work and really decrease issues with poop and pee dramatically.

2. MAKE SURE ADEQUATE SHELTER IS AVAILABLE

People should be able to show up at Pier 80 to get shelter. The city is limiting access by referral. There are over 800 people waiting for traditional shelter that should be able to access the new shelter beds. Pier 80 is full of course (contrary to media reports), but city is slowly moving the number of beds up to 150. When new beds are available, let folks know, and don't limit stays and create a revolving door.

3. ADDRESS THE VERY REAL HEALTH NEEDS OF CAMPERS

As medical outreach teams can tell you, our campers have some very serious health concerns that do need to be addressed. Their health is deteriorating in the elements, many are developing addictive disorders and their mental health is going downhill. Many of these conditions mean shelter is an inappropriate placement. The city must ensure campers have their very real health needs met, and that they have housing in order to recuperate.

4. EXPAND PIER 80

Let folks use the massive parking lot in front of the pier to camp in tents. Let people camp there safely, they have plenty of room. Expand the numbers above 150.

5. EXPAND THE NAVIGATION CENTERS, MAKE SURE IT IS CONNECTED TO HOUSING.

The navigation center has been successful not just because pets, partners and possessions are allowed, but because there is housing at the tail end of the stay. That means turnover and more people are able to get off the streets.

6. IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICES FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The federal government has strong words for localities who are engaging in criminalizing and displacing homeless people who have no choice but to sleep on the streets. They call it cruel and unusual punishment and have released guidelines for sweeps. The basic component is that is the person is doing no harm, no obstructing passage or causing harm, they should not be displaced. Localities should instead find shelters and housing as a solution. San Francisco should follow these best practices.

7. FIND A SUSTAINABLE PROGRESSIVE REVENUE SOURCE FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS.

I know lots of San Franciscans think we already spend a lot on homelessness. We do, but a) there is not a lot of waste, lots of low paid jobs and b) it is only 2.6% of the city budget so you need to have a little perspective. Half the money is paying for housing for 6,000 people, which if we stopped, would double our homeless population, and most of the rest is spent on emergency, health and social services.

Please become a coalition sustainer – giving any amount monthly adds up to a stabilizing force for our hard work. Go to: <http://www.cohsf.org/> and click on donate now!

Check out our **recently released report** in collaboration with SRO Families United

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Broke-Ass Stuart, February 18, 2016

What To Do When Someone Is Having A Mental Health Crisis On The Street
[On-line version](#)

Justin Keller’s absurd, entitled, whiny, **anti-homeless rant** got me thinking about this.

Not long ago I was walking near Church and Market and suddenly there was a bunch of hubbub behind me. You know what I'm talking about, it's not loud and raucous but there's some kind of disturbance that sets off your Spidey-Sense and makes you turn around.

Just then, a butt naked African-American woman in her 40s, ran by screeching and then went into one of the local businesses. It was obvious from the scene and the way things went down that she wasn't one of the nudists who hang out in the Castro (or at least used to before **Scott Wiener banned it**). She was absolutely having a mental health crisis and needed help.

But the question was: who was I supposed to call?

I knew for sure that I didn't want to call the police. There's the great quote by Abraham Maslow that says "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." And unfortunately that's often how it is with the American police. They are trained in ending crisis situations forcefully, but there isn't enough training in how to deescalate them so that no one gets hurt or killed. While that is in the process of changing as we speak, I'd still rather involve people who already have the training.

Unfortunately I didn't have the answer then, and as some of the business owners had begun making phone calls, I continued on to my way hoping they did know who to call. But I decided then to find out who I should call next time something like that arises. Below are the answers:

MOBILE CRISIS TEAM

The Mobile Crisis Treatment Team is made up of a diverse multidisciplinary staff providing psychiatric crisis intervention services for adults located in the City and County of San Francisco.

Phone number: 415-970-4000

Hours:

Monday through Friday 8:30 AM to 11 PM (last field visit at 10PM) Saturdays and Holidays 12 Noon to 8 PM (last field visit at 7PM) [Closed Sundays]

Services Provided:

- Emergency crisis assessment/intervention services conducted in the field
- Early intervention before situation escalates to critical crisis point
- Consultation services provided to consumers, housing/support systems, mental health providers, and other concerned parties
- Assistance with linkage to outpatient mental health services
- 5150 evaluation capacity and determination of appropriate level of care
- Short-term medication services may be available
- Spanish, Russian, and Cantonese/Mandarin speaking staff (schedules vary)
- Available to all adult residents (at least 18 years old), regardless of payer source

CONCRN.ORG

As their site says "When 911 isn't the best option, connect with the Compassionate Response

Network”

Also from their site: We are a compassionate social service network that connects people in need to volunteer responders trained in crisis intervention and mediation. Concerned citizens can download our mobile app on iPhone or Android or call us directly to access our services. We make it easy for both witnesses and victims of nonviolent crises to create a report and directly dispatch our network.

We believe that this “Compassionate Response” model is more humane, harm-reducing, and cost-effective than a law enforcement approach to non-violent crises.

You can learn about their Tenderloin pilot program and download the app [here](#).

311

If it’s not during the hours that the Mobile Crisis Team is open, and it’s not in the Tenderloin (which is where Concrn.org serves) call 311. Explain to them the situation and ask for them to send out the [Homelessness Outreach Team](#).

Are there services that I’m missing? Please let me know in the comments

Thanks to [Jenny Friedenbach](#) and [Amy Weiss](#) for giving me this info.