



Evolution of a community leader

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renewals, 21 days total. Jenks fought harder than anyone to stop it. The city owns nine shelters run by nonprofit contractors who critics say are reluctant to oppose HSA policies, fearing reprisal. Jenks told HSA it can take way longer than 21 days to find permanent housing for the homeless, and turning people back out into the street with no place to stay traumatizes them. The plan was scotched.

"She's courageous and not afraid to stand up for folks," says Friedenbach who has worked with Jenks on raising the city's standard of care in shelters.

The Hospitality House budget is balanced like a portfolio: 48% city government funds, 38% state, 6% federal and 8% private donations. But 92% public money makes it highly vulnerable. The city has threatened cuts seven times in Jenks' 10 years as executive director. For six years, D6 Supervisor Chris Daly got the supes to restore them. Last year, Supervisor Jane Kim got it done. The arduous process seems a mandatory waste of time and energy for Jenks and supporters who organize to testify at every public hearing.

"Some of the years it's partial and others it's the entire budget," Jenks says of the proposed cuts, sitting at a dusty table when workmen were finishing Hospitality House's shelter renovations in February. "But it's significant and more than we could get privately."

THOUSANDS DROP IN

The heart of Hospitality House is the drop-in self-help center at 290 Turk St. Last year 15,000 people, many deeply scarred from trauma, half of them homeless, made 72,000 visits. They used the free phones, bathrooms and the grubby lounge to rest their street-feet and to socialize. Programs are optional.

Jenks is proud of her peer, drop-in center staff hired from the neighborhood.

"They are able to relate to people at a deeper level because of their own experience," she says, "and they give



Jenks' posse: Hospitality House Executive Director Jackie Jenks, center, with some of her 45-member staff before their weekly Monday meeting at the Leavenworth shelter.

PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

back to the community as role models who have gone through rough times.

"And we know people over the course of time — I always thought that was special," Jenks says, "knowing people during their ups and downs. At the heart, it's where people can get things when they need them and at a low threshold entry point. No eligibility requirements. They can come to us in various states of mind. We don't ask a lot of questions."

Hospitality House began as a drop-in gathering spot for flower children who flooded the Haight-Ashbury during 1967's Summer of Love. It, along with Huckleberry's for Runaways and other programs, launched the modern era of free, nonprofit human services in San Francisco.

"We're still a community center but we are part of people's lives at different points," Jenks says. "Someone may get help from us and later seek employment, or volunteer to help us. Some become donors or supporters. Maybe they were one time in our shelter."

MILLION-DOLLAR SHELTER

Hospitality House's shelter at 146 Leavenworth began in 1982 after the homeless population exploded. It was a terrible winter and a line stretched around the corner to snap up one of the 25 second-floor beds for the night. The popular art program that now attracts 2,000 artists occupied the main floor.

As the years wore on, the place got a pass on ADA compliance because of its long-term occupancy and the 1920 building's age. When the owners decided to sell in 2008, it gave Hospitality House first bid. And when the state helped swing the purchase, Jenks started wondering if bringing the shelter up to ADA code was possible for the cash-poor nonprofit. It was unacceptable that people on crutches and wheelchairs had to negotiate the stairs for a bed. It was time to "treat everyone with dignity."

With finally landing enough grants, including \$1 million from the state, the \$1.2 million renovation, which included a basement-to-second-floor elevator, was finished in May. The dignitaries attending the May 4 reopening were full of praise.

Former Mayor Brown, who Jenks said had solidly backed Hospitality House in its budget crises, was impressed with the accomplishment. He remarked at the podium that it took "hundreds and hundreds of hours just to get that elevator." On a building tour later he described Jenks for The Extra as a "rare, dedicated human being whose characteristics and skills should be replicated in all nonprofits."

Introducing Bevan Dufty, the city's director of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement, Jenks recalled once taking 16 clients to City Hall to find support. She showed up at then-Supervisor Dufty's office, unannounced. "He invited us all in and went around the room asking everyone how they would be affected by the budget cuts," Jenks told the crowd. "I'll always remember that as a special day."

Dufty calls her fearless. "Sadly," he adds, "she's had to battle so much for her program. But she stood tall, held her ground. I hope we stop making it so tough on her."

This year's budget strife began March 29 when Districts 5 and 6 interests converged at a jammed Mayor's Town Hall meeting in the Tenderloin Community School's auditorium. It was a community input-only session for the mayor's revolutionary two-year budget. Hospitality House, on the ropes again, was eyeing a proposed \$295,000 cut. Randomly chosen speakers made pleas via microphone before the mayor, department heads and Supervisors Kim and Christina Olague, all seated in front. In the first half hour, a half dozen speakers passionately extolled their oasis in the bleak Tenderloin as Jenks and some staff watched from the back, ready for another all-out campaign.

One formerly homeless man, a Mission Hotel resident through Hospitality House's help, evoked the image of a homeless man in a wheelchair in the rain seeking overnight shelter from a doorway. "We need two or three more Hospitality Houses!" he blurted.

In late May, the tables turned. Mayor Ed Lee restored all the cuts and Hospitality House, through its contract with the Department of Public Health, was solid for two years.

Jenks was "very relieved" and especially happy over the mayor's extra measures to strengthen the city's nonprofit contractors. He included a 1% increase on nonprofits' cost of doing business and instituted prebudget meetings with the nonprofit stakeholders in the neighborhood. Already, Jenks was moving with the momentum.

Insiders say Jenks has retained the qualities the interviewing panel first saw in her 17 years ago. But as she has matured and grown in her role one major change has been obvious.

"She used to have input," says Paul Boden, a close adviser. "Now she has sway."

Jenks introduced Boden as a main speaker at the shelter reopening and "a mentor, a friend and rock to me."

Boden, homeless at 16 after the

death of his mother, was in line and dodging torrential rain for a Hospitality House shelter bed in January 1983. Though times are better now, he told the crowd, the Gordian knot of homelessness still exists and is his daily challenge.

Boden was Friedenbach's predecessor at the Coalition on Homelessness for 16 years and a founder of the Community Housing Partnership, its board president for 10 years.

Jenks "bought into the Hospitality House mission" and has stayed steadfast to it, Boden later told The Extra. Her "sway is a position she takes very seriously. Her sense of commitment and role is bigger than her office — she represents a community (of homelessness)."

JENKS' INIMITABLE STYLE

Her courage, again, is what strikes insiders. She has "inimitable style," Boden calls it, "hard core."

Program Director Elvis Byrd, 28, remembers meeting her 10 years ago as a teenager. She later hired him as a shelter staff substitute. For years, juggling a load of meetings, he notes, she kept her office in the back of the drop-in center to be close to the action and the staff. She's a rock under pressure like budget crises or when broken toilets one year flooded both the drop-in center and the shelter.

"She has extremely optimistic views," Byrd says. "It helps us through hard times and holds us together."

"Most people in her position last two to three years before they burn out. She's been here 17. She's a natural, a model — it's her calling."

Looking back, Jenks was asked, what did she think the panel saw 17 years ago that convinced them to take the gamble.

"I think I gained acceptance by being genuine and forthright about what I brought, being honest about what I didn't know, being open to what came my way." She paused. "Keeping my word. Being consistent. Being loyal."

Jenks recalled a definition from her high school principal in Toledo years ago: "Integrity's something you do when no one is watching." I've tried to operate that way. People watch what you do inside, or on the street. So you want to strive for integrity in your actions.

"It's a cliché, but Hospitality House called to me, spoke to me, the community of people there — they don't hesitate to say what's up. But I had to earn their trust. I was pretty young and had a lot to learn. Still do. But I grew up at Hospitality House."

Lenny Limjoco 1954-2012

An obituary will appear in the July issue

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