

Women in SROs: Group brings safety, confidence

In residential hotels, males outnumber females up to 20-to-1 or more

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

BREAK the Silence, a monthly discussion group, tackles hard issues for women living in residential hotels: violence, being stereotyped as prostitutes, isolation, depression, sexual harassment, intimidation.

The group, part of the Central City SRO Collaborative's Women's Safety Campaign, has been meeting each third Wednesday since January, 4-6 p.m., at 259 Hyde. The Collaborative is a project of Tenderloin Housing Clinic.

"The attendance numbers are an ebb and flow, depending a lot on our outreach," said Leanne Edwards, volunteer campaign coordinator and a tenant rep of her TL SRO. "At our first meeting there were 25, at our last in July there were 17, but we've had as few as five or six. They're always diverse — mothers, single women, transgender women, seniors. The ages range from 22 to 60 and almost all are previously homeless."

Edwards says the gist of the meetings is "supportive empowerment," critical to a population that's an overwhelming minority

in SROs, at least in THC's master lease hotels. For example, at the Elk Hotel on Eddy, only four women live in the 88 units; down the street at the Jefferson, 15 women reside in the 110 units; and at the Vincent on Turk, there are 25 women and 178 men. On Sixth Street at the Seneca, 38 women live in the 203 units.

"We hear constantly about the lack of respect that women get from management and male residents," Edwards said. "There's just this assumption that they're all hookers."

She said she'll continue to collect info about the ratio of women to men in other nonprofit-owned SROs where the Collaborative has tenant reps — Crescent Manor, Lawrence Hotel, Ritz Hotel, Drake, Baldwin House and Hotel Hurley.

The SRO Collaborative trained Edwards, other volunteers and interns in facilitation skills. They take turns facilitating the meetings and share that role with any interested woman in the group. Group members also can take the Collaborative training, if they wish.



PHOTO BY LUIS BARAHONA

Break the Silence facilitators seated from left: Liz Perry and Leanne Edwards. Standing: Amelia Cunningham, Genni Lo, Moana Miglietta and Sarab "Fred" Sberburn-Zimmer.

The next few meetings are Aug. 14 (first-time departure from the regular Wednesdays), Sept. 19, Oct. 17. For information: Leanne Edwards, 775-7110 x102. ■

Peskin takes action on posters; 311 takes its time

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report illegal postings by dialing 311. He would be given a tracking number, and a work order would be forwarded to DPW, which would spruce things up and bill the offenders.

The 311 system, which is supposed to make government more responsive to complaints, was activated in February. A Mayor Newsom pet project since the mayor was a supervisor — 311 is designed to reduce 911's nonemergency calls and simplify access to city services, for which combined there are 2,300 phone numbers.

When the service expanded its hours to 24/7 on March 29, Newsom called it "a powerful tool for holding government accountable." The city expected 80,000 calls a month, "with volumes growing over time as constituents grow familiar with the service and public awareness campaigns begin this summer," a mayor's office news release said at the time.

Response was way underestimated. In April, the first month, 122,000 calls rolled in, according to 311 Executive Director Ed Reiskin. July's count, Reiskin estimated, would be around 170,000. The original estimate, he said, maybe didn't include folks who called city services and hung up before they got their question answered.

Nulty was happy about Lee's message. Momentarily. For when he went back to examine the poles, he found splotchy, ugly defacements. The posters had been glued to the poles, not taped or bound by string, which the sign ordinance stipulates. Scraping posters off, which DPW did, takes paint with it, leaving a mess.

So Nulty sent an email to Lee saying he looked forward to DPW enforcing the code section that charges offenders for the city's cleanup costs, plus a 50% punitive fee. "Would like to be advised when you have billed the campaigns and collected the funds for the removal from all six locations," Nulty wrote.

"But this was just the tip of the iceberg," Nulty said in an interview. "The posters are all over the neighborhood."

Nulty took pictures and emailed them to other TL activists and associates. Then he decided to take Lee's advice. On June 26, he called 311 with four more sites, all brandishing Daly posters — four were up on Larkin, one on Eddy. Meantime, the city repainted the scarred poles.

"Rodney," one of 44 customer service reps and the one who answered Nulty's 311



Supervisor Chris Daly poster at 50 U.N. Plaza.



PHOTOS BY JOHN NULTY

Candidate Matt Drake poster at 335 Leavenworth.

call, took the new particulars — Nulty could hear him typing — and gave him a tracking number.

"I'm not finished," Nulty said. "I want to be informed by DPW when these are taken down and (when the city has) collected for them." He cited the code reference, Article 5.6, Section 184.64 (b), and left a phone number for a call back. Payment is due from the miscreants 10 days from the billing date. Stiffing the city can lead to civil penalties.

On the evening of June 26, the TL Police Station held its monthly Community Room forum. Graffiti abatement experts were high on the agenda. Officer Christopher Putz, who heads SFPD's abatement program, said "sticker-ing," the random slapping of adhesive stickers — some the size of a hand — was very popular now on public and private property. It is pure vandalism, he said, and convictions would lead to probation and multiple repeats would warrant civil action.

In answer to a question about old political posters, Putz quickly replied, "I don't deal with that at all."

Indeed, the city won't lift a finger unless someone like Nulty complains. And the TL, as it turns out, has a disproportionate share of the city's visual pollution.

DPW's 15 staff abatement officers cover 11 districts, Jonathan Vaing, the DPW representative, told the group, and the Tenderloin gets 26% of their time.

"We depend on community policing, and then we send a crew," Vaing said. "Call 311 to get things removed. We get on it as soon as it's reported. There's a 48-hour time gap. More than 48 hours is unacceptable."

On July 10, Nulty, having heard nothing more about his second request, again

lengthened the tip of the iceberg. He called 311 with three more sites. Two were on O'Farrell and one at U.N. Plaza. All were Daly political posters. The reporting process took 10 minutes and Nulty got his tracking numbers.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" the employee who answered asked.

"Is there a way to find out what's happening with the other request I had?" he asked. He gave her the details.

DPW has only one inspector for the whole city, she explained, and the posters can't be removed until they are inspected. She said the deadline to have the work completed was July 16 — three weeks from receiving his complaint. She confirmed that all of Nulty's previous sites were in the system, except a Larkin address that coughed up a blank screen. Surprised, she said she'd consult her supervisor later and then issued a new number for it.

Nulty settled back to wait.

On July 18, two days after DPW's deadline, Nulty trudged over to Little Saigon to check one of the poles. At 625 Larkin at Willow he beheld a disappointing irony. Slapped over the transgressing pole's political poster, and heavily taped, were two pink DPW notices. They announced an Aug. 1 City Hall hearing on changing the city's street cleaning times for 15 nearby sites, including Willow. The Daly poster beneath them was now deeply embedded. DPW had thwarted its own progress.

What next? Nulty wondered.

By July 25, he had heard nothing.

How then did he explain his early success?

"I embarrassed them," he said, referring to buttonholing Peskin. ■