



**SKID ROW
WOMEN'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

2026

She was not born with a crown upon her
head,
nor thunder in her voice,
nor armies at her side.

She was simply a woman
watching, waiting, praying.

But Heaven had written her name
in a moment history would shake.

When fear filled the palace halls,
when silence would have been safer,
when speaking meant risking everything
she chose courage.

She fasted.
She bowed.
She rose.

And somewhere between trembling hands
and steady faith,
a queen was revealed.

Women, hear this:

You may feel hidden.
You may feel ordinary.
You may feel unprepared for the weight of
what is coming.
But strength is not loud.
Power is not pride.
Authority is not cruelty.
True power kneels first.
True courage stands anyway.
Times are coming
when we must stand strong
not against one another,
but beside one another.

No more tearing down.
No more silent suffering.

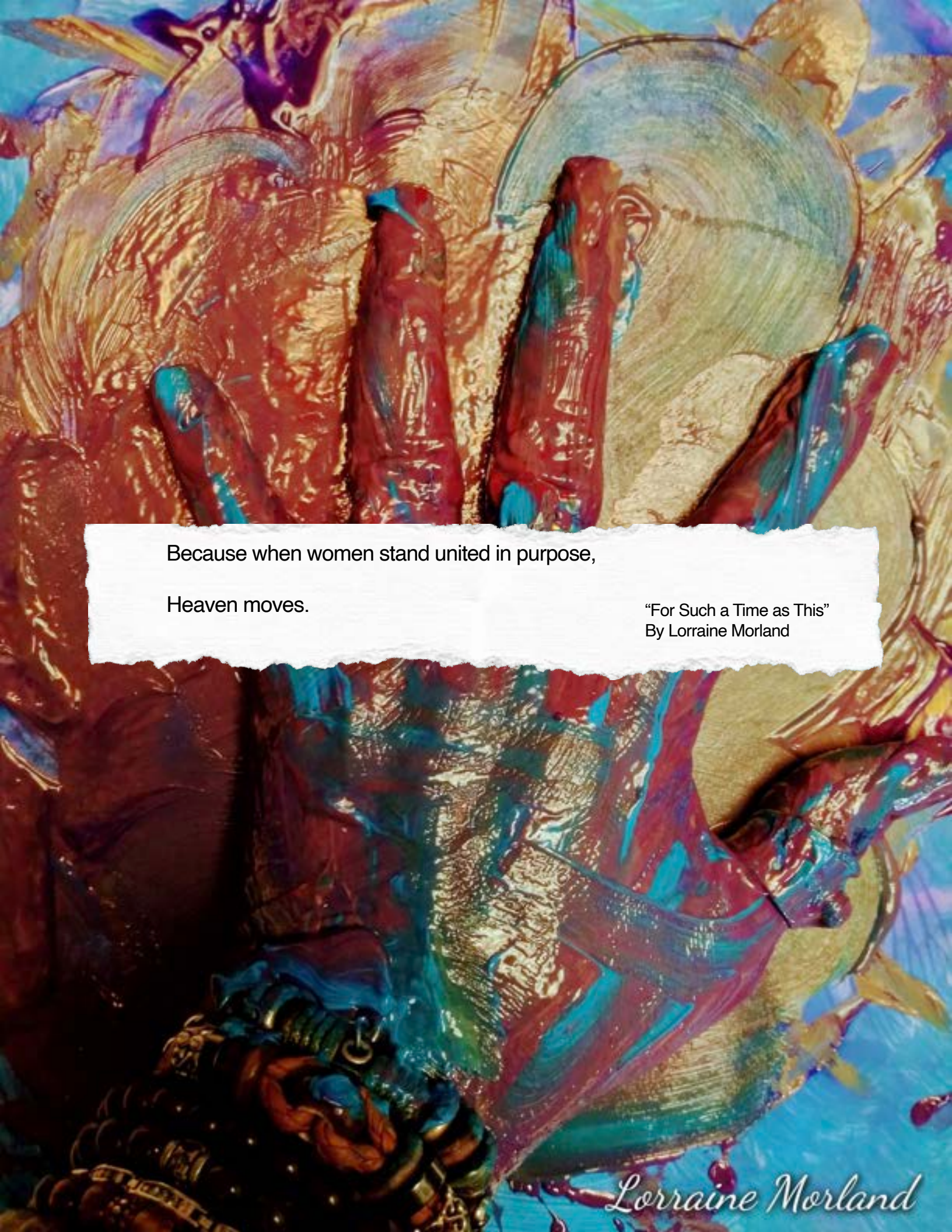
No more shrinking in rooms
we were called to change.

We fast together.
We pray together.
We speak together.

And when one woman rises in faith,
chains break for many.

For such a time as this
you were placed where you are.
Not by accident.
Not by mistake.

So straighten your crown.
Lift your sister's hands.
Let wisdom guide you, not fear.

An abstract painting featuring a central figure, possibly a woman, rendered in bold, expressive brushstrokes. The figure is surrounded by a rich palette of colors including red, blue, green, and gold. The background is a complex mix of these colors, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is highly textured and dynamic.

Because when women stand united in purpose,

Heaven moves.

"For Such a Time as This"
By Lorraine Morland

Lorraine Morland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Women's Needs Assessment was born out of an urgent need: women in Skid Row were being left out of emergency services, out of policy conversations, and out of the data that drives funding, ultimately finding themselves further away from permanent housing. Despite decades of research on homelessness in Los Angeles, few reports have focused specifically and consistently on women in Skid Row. This absence is not incidental; it reflects a pattern of organized abandonment, where the distinct needs of women, in this community, are routinely folded into broader categories and, in the process, overlooked in policy design, funding decisions, and public accountability.

The purpose of this report is to illuminate the lived experiences of women in Skid Row, document current needs, and advance concrete solutions for housing, health, safety, and well-being. Through mapped narratives, healing circles, focus groups, interviews, and a large gathering at the annual Skid Row Women's Wellness Retreat organized by DWAC, women shared not only what has happened to them—but how they understand their journey into homelessness, how they survive it, and what it will take to ensure women in Skid Row have safe, dignified permanent housing and the full range of determinants needed to meaningfully improve their living conditions.

The dominant public narrative suggests that homelessness is the result of personal failure—poor choices, untreated mental illness, addiction, or an inability to maintain stability. This report rejects that narrative. The evidence presented here demonstrates that women's homelessness in Skid Row is overwhelmingly produced by structural forces: generational displacement, housing unaffordability, systemic violence, and institutional practices that prolong instability rather than resolve it.

Women are not falling through cracks in the system. The system itself produces and reproduces their displacement. Rather than individual breakdown, the findings in this report reveal three interconnected structural patterns shaping women's homelessness in Skid Row:

- Generational displacement — housing instability and poverty reproduced across family lines.
- Prolonged homelessness — years spent cycling through shelters, programs, and temporary placements without permanent housing.
- Structural barriers — unaffordable housing, discrimination, disability, administrative barriers, and punitive policies that criminalize survival and restrict access to housing and services.

Together, these conditions create a sustained environment of instability that pushes women into homelessness and keeps them there. The data tells a compelling story. A story that illustrates the conditions creating and sustaining homelessness for women in Skid Row are not isolated incidents, but interconnected structural forces that compound over time. The crisis is expanding generationally, with younger mothers increasingly represented in Skid Row. 80% of participants ages 18–29 are currently unhoused, LAHSA estimates Skid Row homelessness is concentrated among adults: 25–54 (2,247; 66%), 55–61 (516; 15%), and 62+ (511; 15%). (LAHSA, 2025). Between 40–56% of women across age groups cite unaffordability as the primary barrier to securing stable housing. With Black women representing 51% of respondents—compared to 24% Latina, 14% White, and 0.7% Asian—these findings point to sustained racialized disparities in housing access. Nearly half (45%) of respondents experienced homelessness growing up and approximately 60% report having a disability. More than 70% of older women live with a disability often in conditions that would raise serious concerns, and not be tolerated, if they occurred in any other neighborhood. Food insecurity remains acute: 63% reported worrying in the last year about whether they would have enough food and 48.3% of women had low dietary choices meaning they had very little control over their food choices. Across age groups, women reported extended periods without stable housing, cycling through shelters, tents, vehicles, hotels, and transitional programs. Many report citations, arrests, harassment, or constant fear of police contact. Overall, women consistently identified lack of affordable housing availability as a primary barrier to exiting homelessness.

This report interrogates a rarely named pipeline—the reproduction of generational displacement that culminates in Skid Row. Here, we examine the structural pathways that shape women's experiences, including early displacement, economic exclusion, disability, and limited access to permanent housing. We highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of women demonstrating that women are building community solutions even in the absence of structural investment, concluding with targeted, community-informed recommendations to expand women-centered housing options, improve equitable access to resources, and strengthen systems that support long-term stability. This assessment provides a rich, data-informed account of women's realities in Skid Row and offers clear direction for policy and funding decisions moving forward.

INTRODUCTION

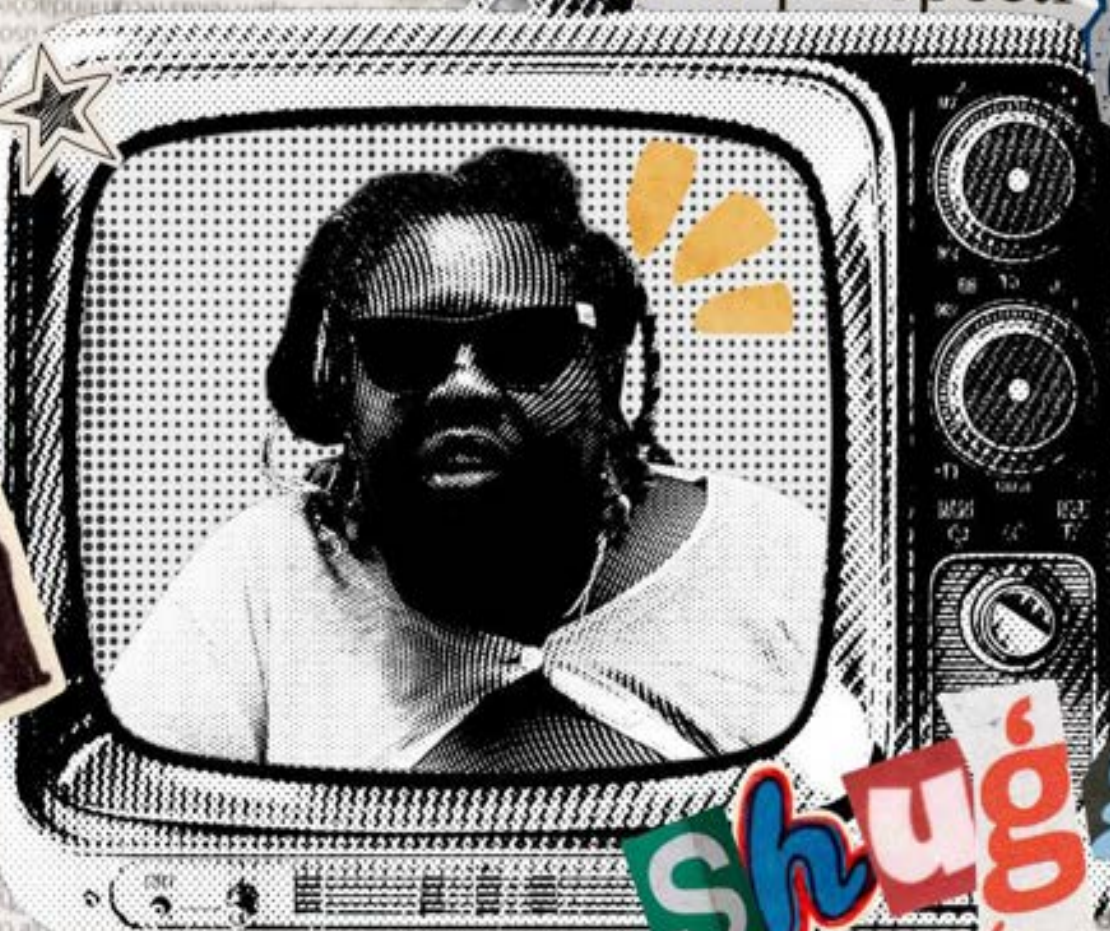
The Women's Needs Assessment is born from lived experience. It is produced by members of the Downtown Women's Action Coalition (DWAC), predominantly Black feminist organizers, forging a community in conditions shaped by displacement, criminalization, and state violence. Our authority in this work was built through accumulated knowledge and practice, whether or not it was formally validated by the institutions that typically define expertise, overlook or exclude us. We came through survival, struggle, and a shared responsibility to one another. Our analysis is rooted in the everyday realities of women navigating Skid Row while resisting systems designed to extract, exclude, punish and banish us. Our work is grounded in radical Black feminist practice—shaping how we build community, how we tell the truth about our conditions, and how we organize to confront the structures that harm us. We understand that racism, sexism, gendered violence, poverty, housing status, migration, disability, criminalization, and state control are not separate issues. They operate together. This report stands firmly in the lineage of Black feminist thinkers and organizers who have taught us to see power clearly, center care, and fight for collective freedom—without importing frameworks that erase the specific conditions of Skid Row or separate theory from lived struggle.

This report seeks to examine the pathways into homelessness for women in Skid Row and to understand what—if anything—has changed since our last Women's Needs Assessment in 2020. It examines the pipeline to homelessness through community gatherings, lived stories, mapping, interviews, and surveys conducted with women in Skid Row. These methods are not neutral data-collection tools; they are political acts. They allow women to name their own realities, document harm in their own words, and identify what safety, stability, and dignity actually mean in practice. Our intention is to uplift the lived experiences of women in Skid Row, identify the current needs, and surface community-defined solutions for housing, health outcomes, and overall well-being. This report is not an academic exercise or a service-provider document. It is a collective testimony. It exists to place the truths of women in Skid Row on record and to challenge the laws, policies, and institutions that target Black and Brown women, poor, disabled, migrant women, gender expansive people and members of the LGBTQ+, for displacement, surveillance, family separation, and incarceration. We are clear: this is not charity work. This is power-building work. It is about naming harm, demanding accountability, and asserting housing as a human right.

The Women's Needs Assessment centers the voices of women directly impacted—speaking in our own words about what we need, what we want, and what we deserve. We refuse to let agencies, politicians, or nonprofits that do not serve us speak on our behalf. This report documents how women create care systems where the state has failed, how we protect one another, and how we organize for survival and material change. In one of the most dangerous political moments we have faced—marked by laws that criminalize existence, policies that erase us, and systems that thrive on our crisis—this is an expression of our truth. The pipeline to homelessness does not begin on the streets, it is inherited across generations. This assessment traces how housing instability, criminalization, health inequities, family separation, and state violence have shaped the lives of women, their mothers, their grandmothers, and their daughters. What emerges is not a series of individual failures, but a patterned history of harm—where the same systems that displaced previous generations continue to funnel women into crisis, surveillance, and prolonged homelessness today.

This report makes visible how these conditions are reproduced over time: how poverty is passed down, how state intervention replaces care, how marginalized women are consistently positioned as disposable, unfit, or undeserving of safety and stability. The pathways women describe reveal a continuity of violence and exclusion that stretches across lineages, demonstrating that homelessness is not a rupture from normal life, but a predictable outcome of policies and practices that have targeted women and their families for decades. The report concludes with recommendations and community-driven strategies to improve housing availability for women and confront systemic disparities related to safety, access, and resource allocation. These strategies are grounded in the wisdom of women living these conditions—women who carry both the weight of generational harm and the knowledge required to end it. It speaks not only to survival but a determination to disrupt cycles of displacement so that future generations of women are no longer consigned to the same conditions.

UPGRADE



\$ \$ \$

SHUGGA

**TO A LIL WHITE BOY
PRESENTS THE UGLY BLACK WOMAN STORY WITH RICH BLACK GIRLS
WRECKS AFFECT**

**IMAGINE THE MOST BEAUTIFULEST THING IN THIS WORLD. HIGHLY DISFUNCTIONAL
HI! SIMONE. UPGRADE. SHUGGA. UPGRADE. SONYA C. ONE OF SKIDROW FORMER
INDEPENDENT ARTIST WRITER A SKINNY PO WHO DOES NOT EASILY FIT INTO ANY
PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE IT IN FILM 🎬 AND
TELEVISION 📺 HAS A GOT DAMN RIGHT TO CONTRIBUTE A VERSE.
THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT.**

**PEEWEE THE LONG WAY
SONYA C**



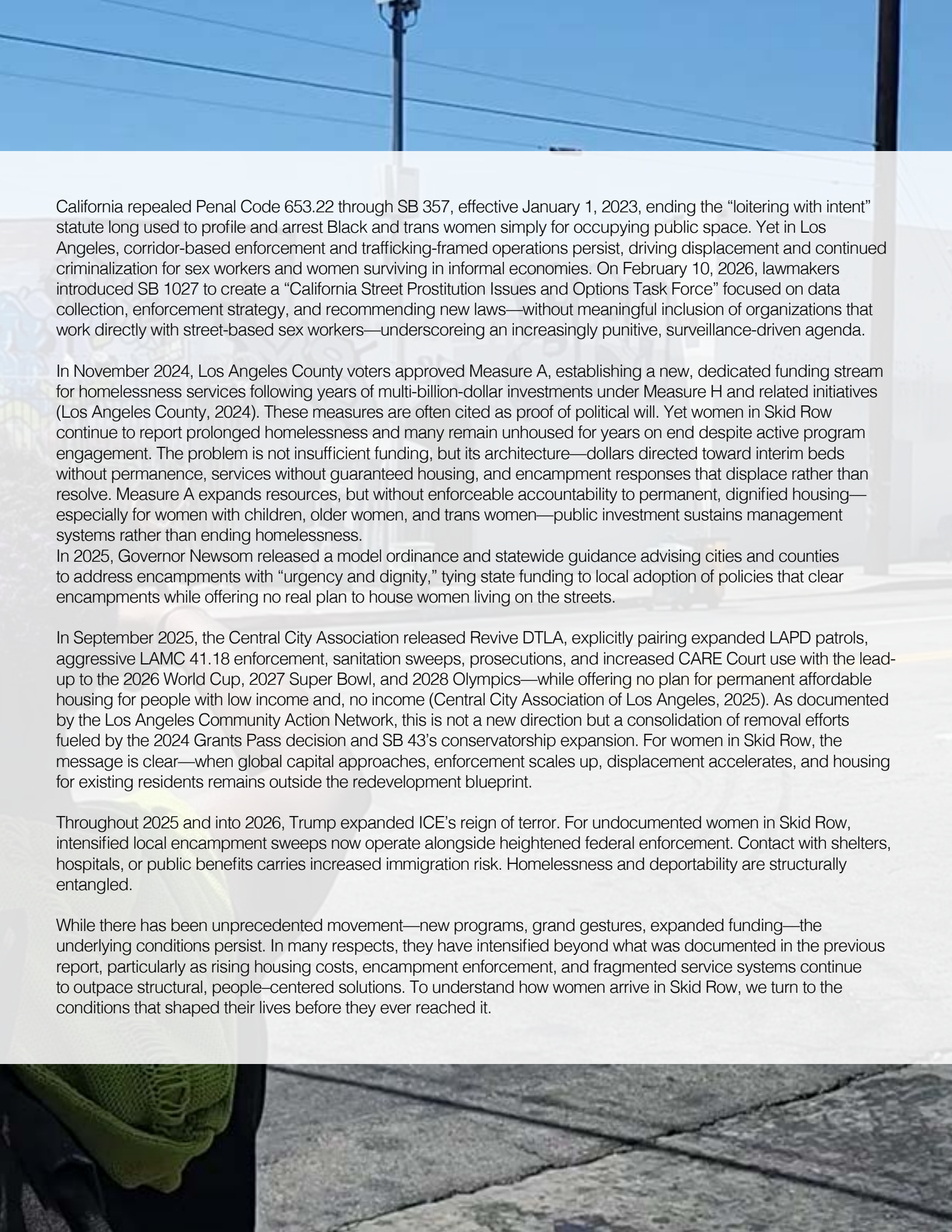
LOOKING BACK TO GO FORWARD

Since the 2020 Women's Report, the environment shaping women's lives in Skid Row has shifted in several significant ways that materially affect their stability, safety, and access to resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, California enacted temporary eviction protections and rental assistance programs, including the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act (SB 91), to prevent mass displacement (California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, 2021). While these measures offered short-term relief, they were time-limited and administratively complex. As protections expired, many low-income women and single mothers were left with accumulated rental debt and faced eviction filings. Some of the participants in this report lost their housing following the abrupt withdrawal of rental assistance, illustrating how temporary safeguards delayed—but did not resolve—underlying housing precarity.

Women in Skid Row now face expanded enforcement authority, increased court involvement in behavioral health, and emergency response frameworks that prioritize encampment resolution without guaranteeing permanent housing. In 2022, Los Angeles scaled up enforcement under LAMC 41.18, broadening the areas where sitting, lying, sleeping, or storing belongings can be criminalized. This increased the legal grounds for displacement across Skid Row and surrounding areas. In June 2024, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* further emboldened municipal authority to enforce anti-camping ordinances, even where shelter availability is limited, removing a constitutional protection that had previously restricted how enforcement could be carried out and increasing the legal tools local governments can use to sweep and criminalize homelessness (Human Rights Watch, 2024). After the Grants Pass decision, California Governor Newsom issued an executive order (July 25, 2024) directing state agencies to adopt policies to remove encampments on state property and urging local governments to act with similar urgency. Collectively, these developments have reinforced a legal environment in which unsheltered survival on public streets is treated as a punishable condition rather than a structural failure.

At the state level, California enacted the CARE Act (SB 1338) in 2022, with phased implementation beginning in late 2023, authorizing court-ordered treatment plans for individuals diagnosed with certain serious mental health conditions (California Legislative Information, 2022a). In October 2023, SB 43 expanded the definition of "grave disability" in conservatorship law to include severe substance use disorder (California Legislative Information, 2023). These measures increase judicial and institutional authority over individuals with mental health conditions and who use substances. For women in Skid Row—particularly Black women, trans women, disabled women, and survivors of violence—this shift expands the likelihood that contact with systems occurs through courts and law enforcement rather than through voluntary, housing-centered care.

Locally, Mayor Bass declared a homelessness emergency in December 2022 and launched the Inside Safe initiative to move people from encampments into temporary hotel or interim housing placements. While framed as housing-led, implementation happened with accelerated encampment removals, and permanent housing superseded by interim options. During the same period, the City's police budget has continued to grow, approximately \$3 billion in the FY 2025–26 adopted budget. These budgetary decisions demonstrate an ongoing investment in enforcement systems, despite consistent reports from women of police misconduct, extended periods of homelessness, and prolonged delays in securing stable housing.



California repealed Penal Code 653.22 through SB 357, effective January 1, 2023, ending the “loitering with intent” statute long used to profile and arrest Black and trans women simply for occupying public space. Yet in Los Angeles, corridor-based enforcement and trafficking-framed operations persist, driving displacement and continued criminalization for sex workers and women surviving in informal economies. On February 10, 2026, lawmakers introduced SB 1027 to create a “California Street Prostitution Issues and Options Task Force” focused on data collection, enforcement strategy, and recommending new laws—without meaningful inclusion of organizations that work directly with street-based sex workers—underscoring an increasingly punitive, surveillance-driven agenda.

In November 2024, Los Angeles County voters approved Measure A, establishing a new, dedicated funding stream for homelessness services following years of multi-billion-dollar investments under Measure H and related initiatives (Los Angeles County, 2024). These measures are often cited as proof of political will. Yet women in Skid Row continue to report prolonged homelessness and many remain unhoused for years on end despite active program engagement. The problem is not insufficient funding, but its architecture—dollars directed toward interim beds without permanence, services without guaranteed housing, and encampment responses that displace rather than resolve. Measure A expands resources, but without enforceable accountability to permanent, dignified housing—especially for women with children, older women, and trans women—public investment sustains management systems rather than ending homelessness.

In 2025, Governor Newsom released a model ordinance and statewide guidance advising cities and counties to address encampments with “urgency and dignity,” tying state funding to local adoption of policies that clear encampments while offering no real plan to house women living on the streets.

In September 2025, the Central City Association released Revive DTLA, explicitly pairing expanded LAPD patrols, aggressive LAMC 41.18 enforcement, sanitation sweeps, prosecutions, and increased CARE Court use with the lead-up to the 2026 World Cup, 2027 Super Bowl, and 2028 Olympics—while offering no plan for permanent affordable housing for people with low income and, no income (Central City Association of Los Angeles, 2025). As documented by the Los Angeles Community Action Network, this is not a new direction but a consolidation of removal efforts fueled by the 2024 Grants Pass decision and SB 43’s conservatorship expansion. For women in Skid Row, the message is clear—when global capital approaches, enforcement scales up, displacement accelerates, and housing for existing residents remains outside the redevelopment blueprint.

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, Trump expanded ICE’s reign of terror. For undocumented women in Skid Row, intensified local encampment sweeps now operate alongside heightened federal enforcement. Contact with shelters, hospitals, or public benefits carries increased immigration risk. Homelessness and deportability are structurally entangled.

While there has been unprecedented movement—new programs, grand gestures, expanded funding—the underlying conditions persist. In many respects, they have intensified beyond what was documented in the previous report, particularly as rising housing costs, encampment enforcement, and fragmented service systems continue to outpace structural, people-centered solutions. To understand how women arrive in Skid Row, we turn to the conditions that shaped their lives before they ever reached it.



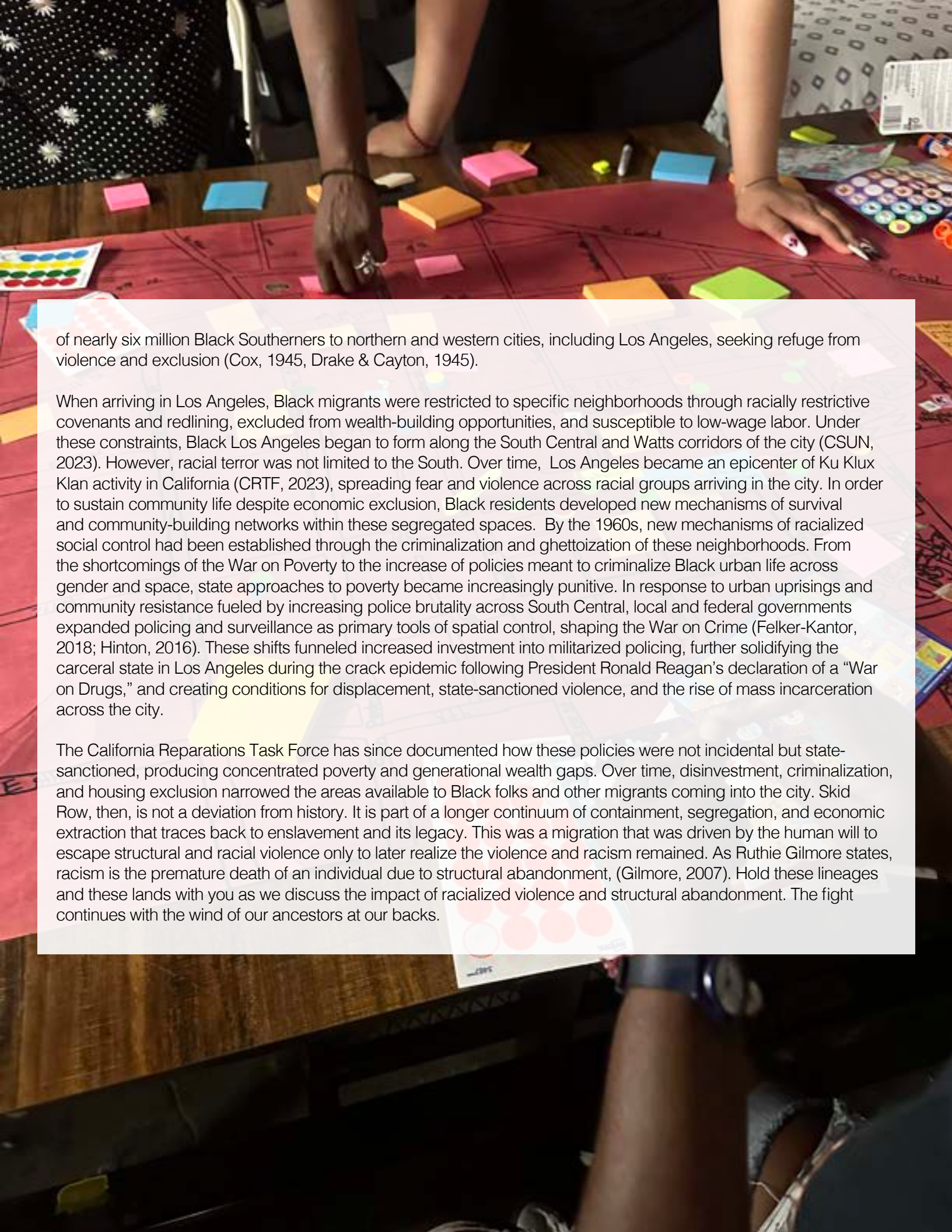
BEFORE “I” LIVED IN SKID ROW: WOMEN AND THEIR LINEAGE

“I FEEL REALLY GOOD TO KNOW WHERE I COME FROM, TO KNOW WHERE MY ROOTS STARTED. AS OPPOSED TO WHERE I AM. IT GAVE ME A SENSE OF SELF.”



Many women interviewed in this report discussed their family and intimate details about their intrapersonal relationships within their family networks. They spoke of where they came from and who traveled with them to California. As we journey through the lives of these women, this report grounds them and us in their ancestors and the land that is tied to their lineage. It is the lands that hold our story, that help us understand our history and our identity. We lift up their lineage and ties to the land in no particular order; Lafayette-Louisiana, Los Angeles, California, Cincinnati, Ohio, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, Missoula-Montana, Rhode Island, Chicago- Illinois, Houston- Texas, Maryland, El Salvador, Alabama, Missouri, Little Rock Arkansas, Florida, Virginia, New York, Puerto Rico, Blackfoot (tribe?), Bermuda, Brazil, Haiti, South Carolina, Cuba, Detroit- Michigan, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Honduras, and Philadelphia.

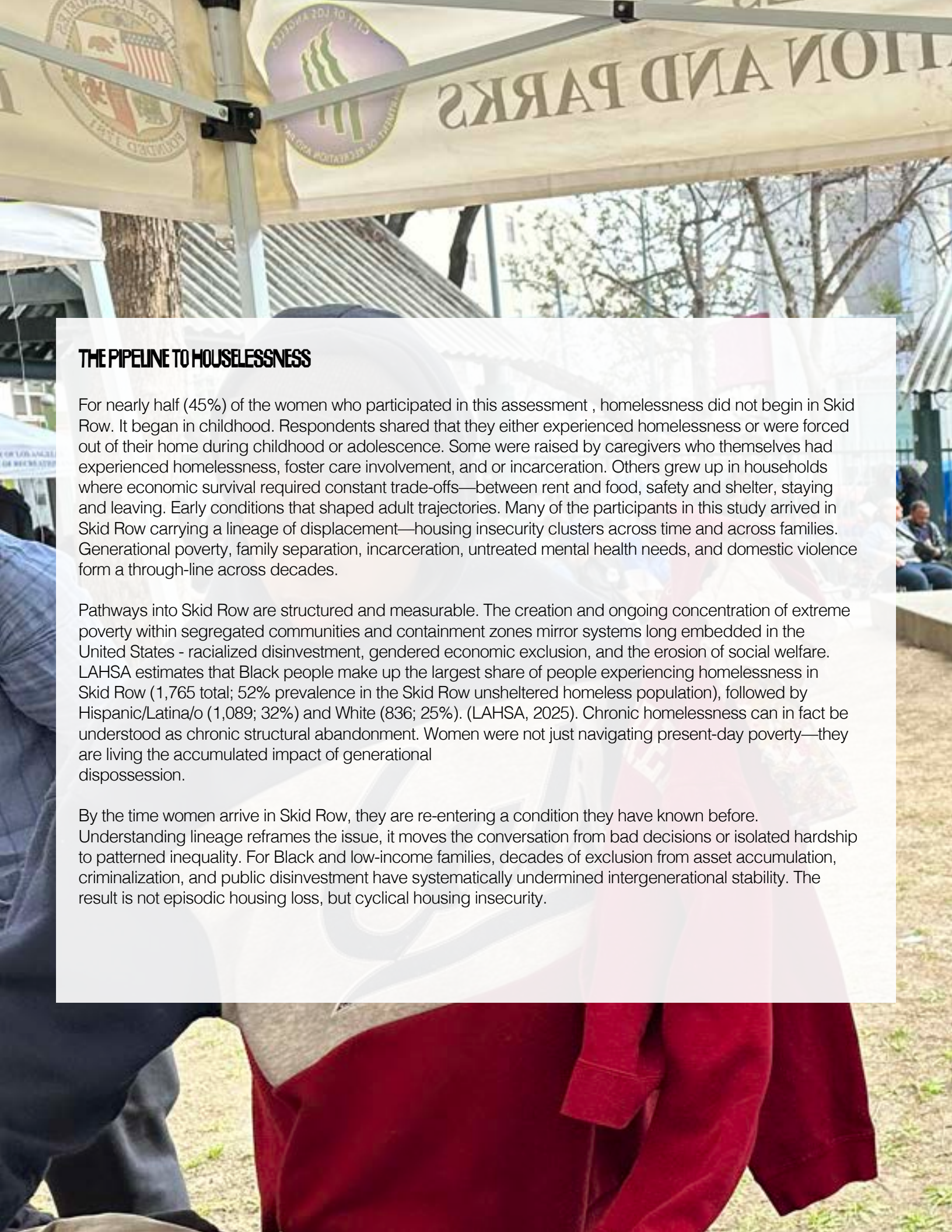
There is no mistake that these areas are very familiar to Black communities that survived chattel slavery. We would be remiss if we did not tell the fuller story of why so many Black women in this report have ties to these geographies and how they arrived in California. Between 1915–1970, the Great Migration was not simply a movement toward opportunity; it was a mass displacement driven by racial terror. As documented by Ida B. Wells and later documented by Isabel Wilkerson, Black families fled lynching, sexual violence, racial terror, and systems of economic bondage that made survival and everyday life in the South increasingly difficult (Cox, 1945). This led to the relocation



of nearly six million Black Southerners to northern and western cities, including Los Angeles, seeking refuge from violence and exclusion (Cox, 1945, Drake & Cayton, 1945).

When arriving in Los Angeles, Black migrants were restricted to specific neighborhoods through racially restrictive covenants and redlining, excluded from wealth-building opportunities, and susceptible to low-wage labor. Under these constraints, Black Los Angeles began to form along the South Central and Watts corridors of the city (CSUN, 2023). However, racial terror was not limited to the South. Over time, Los Angeles became an epicenter of Ku Klux Klan activity in California (CRTF, 2023), spreading fear and violence across racial groups arriving in the city. In order to sustain community life despite economic exclusion, Black residents developed new mechanisms of survival and community-building networks within these segregated spaces. By the 1960s, new mechanisms of racialized social control had been established through the criminalization and ghettoization of these neighborhoods. From the shortcomings of the War on Poverty to the increase of policies meant to criminalize Black urban life across gender and space, state approaches to poverty became increasingly punitive. In response to urban uprisings and community resistance fueled by increasing police brutality across South Central, local and federal governments expanded policing and surveillance as primary tools of spatial control, shaping the War on Crime (Felker-Kantor, 2018; Hinton, 2016). These shifts funneled increased investment into militarized policing, further solidifying the carceral state in Los Angeles during the crack epidemic following President Ronald Reagan's declaration of a "War on Drugs," and creating conditions for displacement, state-sanctioned violence, and the rise of mass incarceration across the city.

The California Reparations Task Force has since documented how these policies were not incidental but state-sanctioned, producing concentrated poverty and generational wealth gaps. Over time, disinvestment, criminalization, and housing exclusion narrowed the areas available to Black folks and other migrants coming into the city. Skid Row, then, is not a deviation from history. It is part of a longer continuum of containment, segregation, and economic extraction that traces back to enslavement and its legacy. This was a migration that was driven by the human will to escape structural and racial violence only to later realize the violence and racism remained. As Ruthie Gilmore states, racism is the premature death of an individual due to structural abandonment, (Gilmore, 2007). Hold these lineages and these lands with you as we discuss the impact of racialized violence and structural abandonment. The fight continues with the wind of our ancestors at our backs.



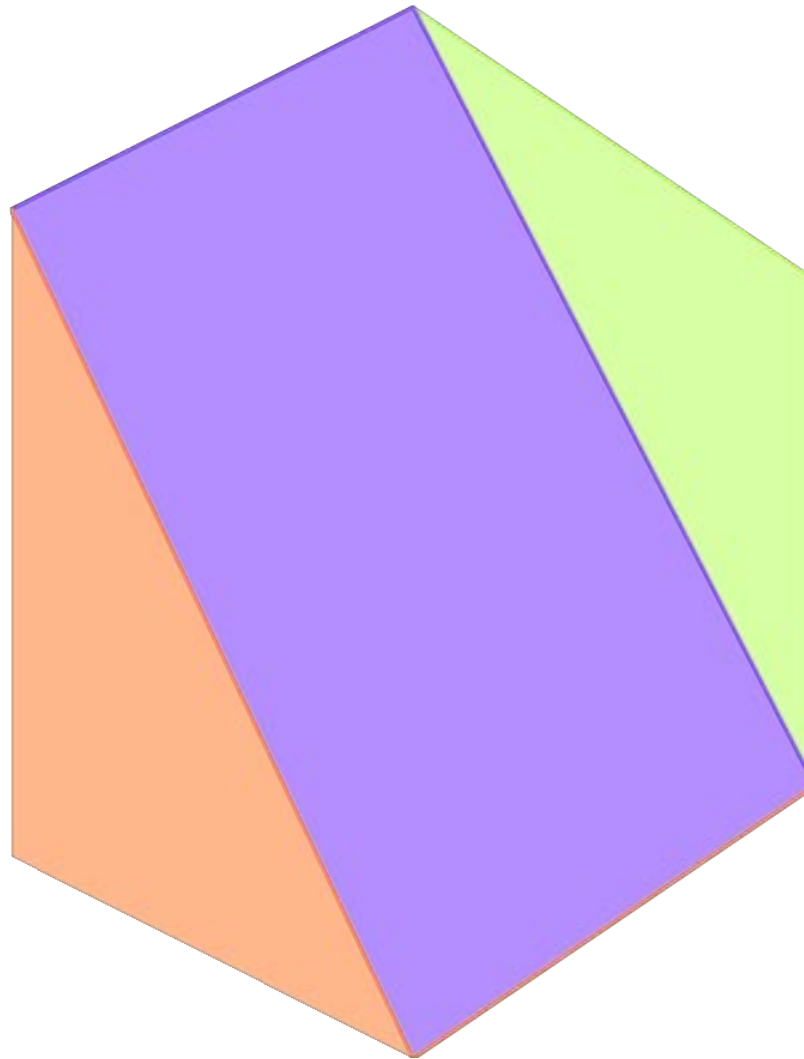
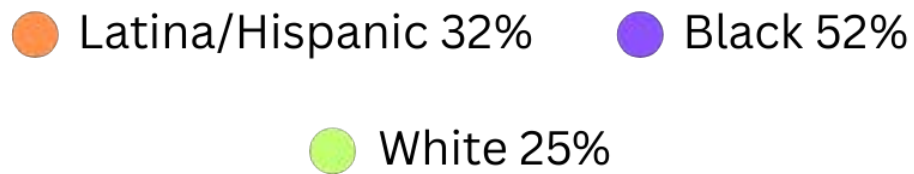
THE PIPELINE TO HOUSELESSNESS

For nearly half (45%) of the women who participated in this assessment, homelessness did not begin in Skid Row. It began in childhood. Respondents shared that they either experienced homelessness or were forced out of their home during childhood or adolescence. Some were raised by caregivers who themselves had experienced homelessness, foster care involvement, and or incarceration. Others grew up in households where economic survival required constant trade-offs—between rent and food, safety and shelter, staying and leaving. Early conditions that shaped adult trajectories. Many of the participants in this study arrived in Skid Row carrying a lineage of displacement—housing insecurity clusters across time and across families. Generational poverty, family separation, incarceration, untreated mental health needs, and domestic violence form a through-line across decades.

Pathways into Skid Row are structured and measurable. The creation and ongoing concentration of extreme poverty within segregated communities and containment zones mirror systems long embedded in the United States - racialized disinvestment, gendered economic exclusion, and the erosion of social welfare. LAHSA estimates that Black people make up the largest share of people experiencing homelessness in Skid Row (1,765 total; 52% prevalence in the Skid Row unsheltered homeless population), followed by Hispanic/Latina/o (1,089; 32%) and White (836; 25%). (LAHSA, 2025). Chronic homelessness can in fact be understood as chronic structural abandonment. Women were not just navigating present-day poverty—they are living the accumulated impact of generational dispossession.

By the time women arrive in Skid Row, they are re-entering a condition they have known before. Understanding lineage reframes the issue, it moves the conversation from bad decisions or isolated hardship to patterned inequality. For Black and low-income families, decades of exclusion from asset accumulation, criminalization, and public disinvestment have systematically undermined intergenerational stability. The result is not episodic housing loss, but cyclical housing insecurity.





FOR NEARLY HALF OF THE WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS ASSESSMENT , HOMELESSNESS DID NOT BEGIN IN SKID ROW.

IT BEGAN IN CHILDHOOD.





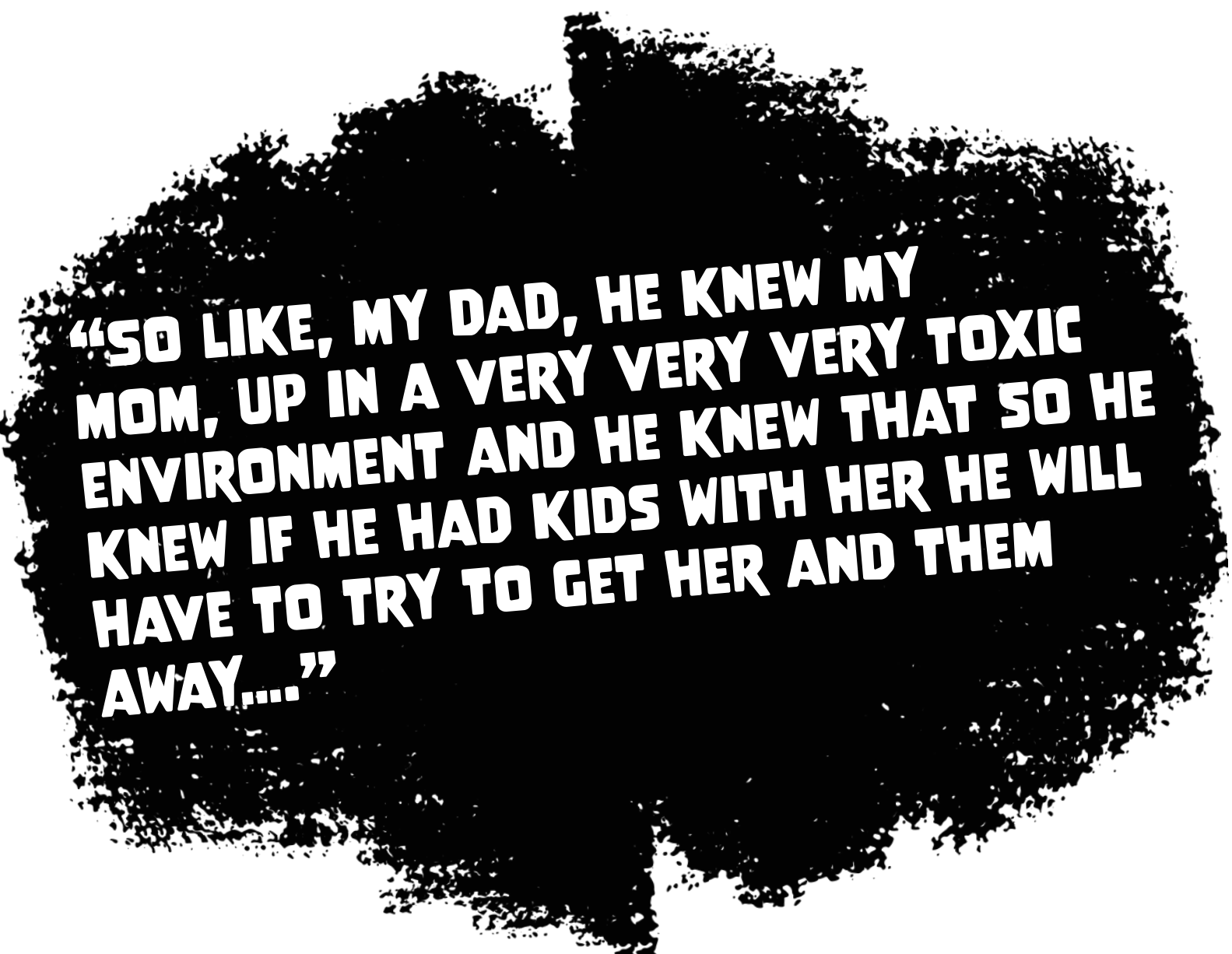
GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND STRUCTURALLY PRODUCED CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY

Part of understanding a woman's journey through housing insecurity is understanding how she experienced her childhood. A disproportionate number of women in this study identified as Black or Indigenous, many with family roots in the U.S. South. Across generations, their families experienced poverty, segregation, redlining, and exclusion—conditions that shaped the environments in which children were raised. These histories matter as they demonstrate stress and insecurity accumulated over time and across family lines as generational trauma that often goes unacknowledged preventing a deeper understanding of family dynamics and experiences (Petion et al., 2022).

This particular woman in our report expressed a desire to remove herself from the stress of intergenerational trauma. She describes her childhood environment as “toxic” and speaks about the journey of trying to “get away.” But with a closer listen she identifies this desire to escape from toxicity didn’t start with just her.

**“SO MY WHOLE
LIFE I FEEL LIKE
IT WAS A FIGHT
OF TRYING TO
GET AWAY FROM
THE TOXICITY
BEFORE I EVEN
STARTED TRYING
TO GET AWAY
FROM IT.”**

As she continues to reflect, she shares the different environments her parents grew up in, specifically calling our attention to her mothers childhood and the toxicity her mother was surrounded by. The participant explains that her father also knew that he needed to escape “toxicity” and create a safe space for his future family and her mother. This participant continues to explain the trauma of poverty and “system” based oppressions such as the lack of access to basic life resources such as housing, food, school, parks, and safety. She knew what her mother went through and how poverty impacted her interpersonal relationships.



“SO LIKE, MY DAD, HE KNEW MY MOM, UP IN A VERY VERY VERY TOXIC ENVIRONMENT AND HE KNEW THAT SO HE KNEW IF HE HAD KIDS WITH HER HE WILL HAVE TO TRY TO GET HER AND THEM AWAY....”

This participant shares a clear understanding of the connection of poverty to intergenerational trauma.

“MY MOM IS SYSTEM BASED BUT ALSO, YOU KNOW... - IN HER COMMUNITY - YES. IT’S LIKE ALL THOSE THINGS THAT WE TALKED ABOUT THAT DAY, MY MOM LIVED IT. SO LIKE MOLESTATION, DRUGS, HAVING TO WORK AT 10 YEARS OLD, BEING THE YOUNGEST, BEING THE OLDEST, YOU KNOW THAT WAS HER LIFE.”

Many women throughout the interview and survey process spoke of similar challenging childhood experiences.

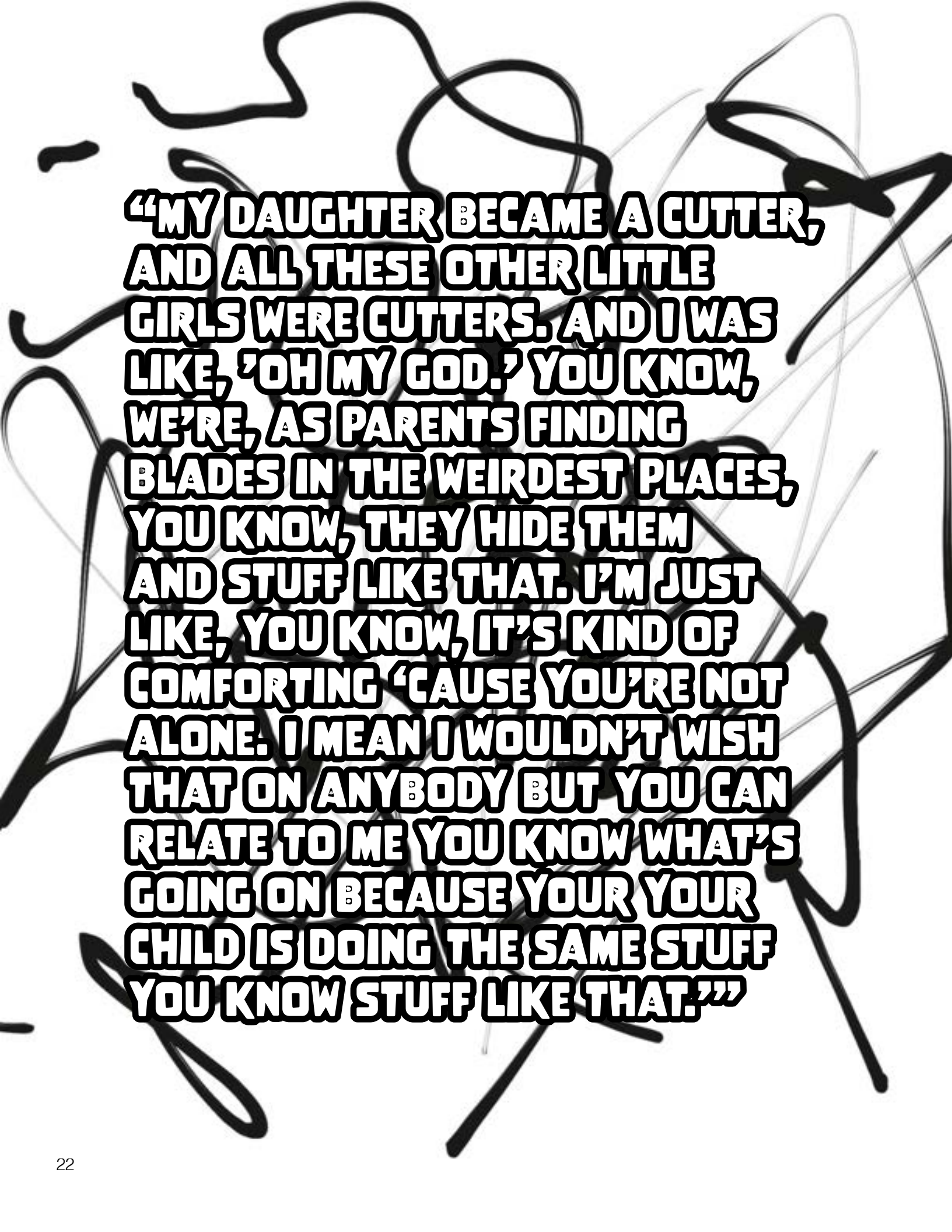
Today, social scientists refer to this lived reality as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025). ACEs explicitly refer to stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood typically before 18 years of age. The term originated in 1998 from a study that demonstrated that childhood trauma or ACEs is associated with neurological developmental delay and adult chronic health and mental health issues (Felliti et al., 1998; Vishwanath & Maxwell, 2023).

One participant who was struggling with housing insecurity shared how she was able to see similar harmful coping mechanisms present themselves in children of mothers going through the same extremes of poverty.

**“YEAH THEY HAVE
SIMILAR EXPERIENCES
WITH THEIR CHILDREN,
LIKE ALMOST IDENTICAL
SOMETIMES I SEE THESE
MOTHERS GOING THROUGH
THE EXACT SAME STUFF I
WAS GOING THROUGH.”**

She continues by sharing her fear when finding items her daughter was using to hurt herself. However she also continues to explain the comfort brought to her by knowing other housing insecure women were also experiencing similar challenges with their children. These challenges stopped being rare and became a pattern surfacing in other children experiencing poverty.





**"MY DAUGHTER BECAME A CUTTER,
AND ALL THESE OTHER LITTLE
GIRLS WERE CUTTERS. AND I WAS
LIKE, 'OH MY GOD.' YOU KNOW,
WE'RE, AS PARENTS FINDING
BLADES IN THE WEIRDEST PLACES,
YOU KNOW, THEY HIDE THEM
AND STUFF LIKE THAT. I'M JUST
LIKE, YOU KNOW, IT'S KIND OF
COMFORTING 'CAUSE YOU'RE NOT
ALONE. I MEAN I WOULDN'T WISH
THAT ON ANYBODY BUT YOU CAN
RELATE TO ME YOU KNOW WHAT'S
GOING ON BECAUSE YOUR YOUR
CHILD IS DOING THE SAME STUFF
YOU KNOW STUFF LIKE THAT.'"**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are not individual or familial failures. Rather, they are a reflection of “economic hardship, unstable housing, and lack of access to healthcare” produced by structural conditions and inequities that cannot be isolated as solely family dysfunction (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). When families are economically struggling to ensure basic needs are met, mental and physical health resources are often unaffordable, unattainable, or insufficient. When Adverse Childhood Experiences are assessed only at the household level, this broader context is missed. Interpersonal violence and instability are real, but they are shaped by the conditions families are navigating. Accounting for lineage and intergenerational stress strengthens how ACEs are understood and supports responses that address root causes rather than misplacing responsibility (Hughes & Tucker, 2018).

Research in epigenetics shows that prolonged exposure to trauma and stress can influence biological stress responses and that these effects may be transmitted across generations (Yehuda et al.; DeGruy). Frameworks such as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome describe how historical and racialized trauma continues to shape health, behavior, and survival strategies today. Dr. Uché Blackstock has emphasized that health outcomes and stress responses cannot be understood apart from the long-term effects of racism, segregation, and unequal access to care, which shape bodies and communities over time. Her work reinforces that what is often treated as individual vulnerability is better understood as the cumulative impact of chronic, racialized stress embedded in social and institutional environments (Blackstock, 2022). Throughout the interview sessions women frequently spoke of growing up within households where family members and themselves experienced mental health challenges.

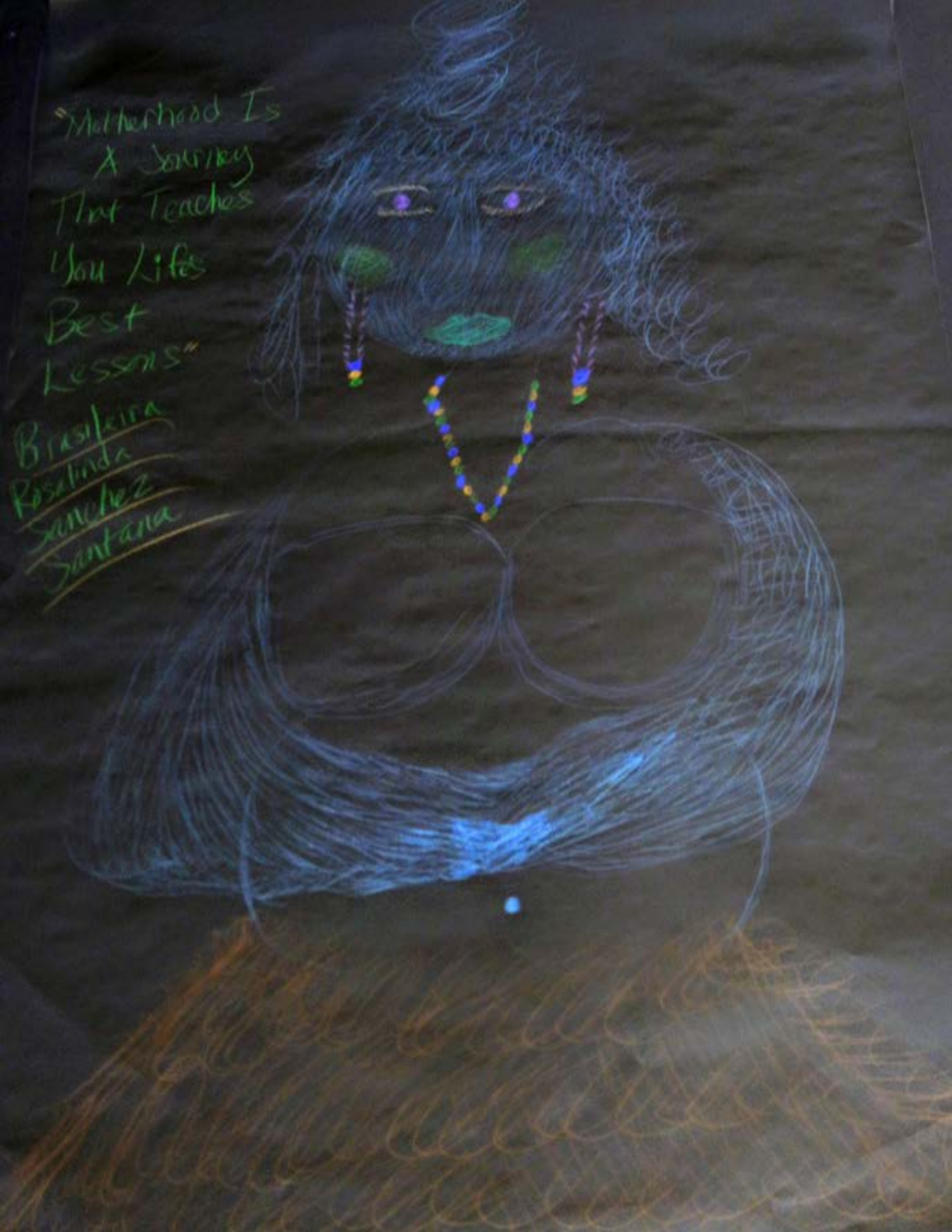
“YEAH, BECAUSE MY MOTHER IS A SCARY WOMAN, MY MOM WAS VERY ABUSIVE TO MY OTHER SIBLINGS AND JUST A VERY ABUSIVE WOMAN”

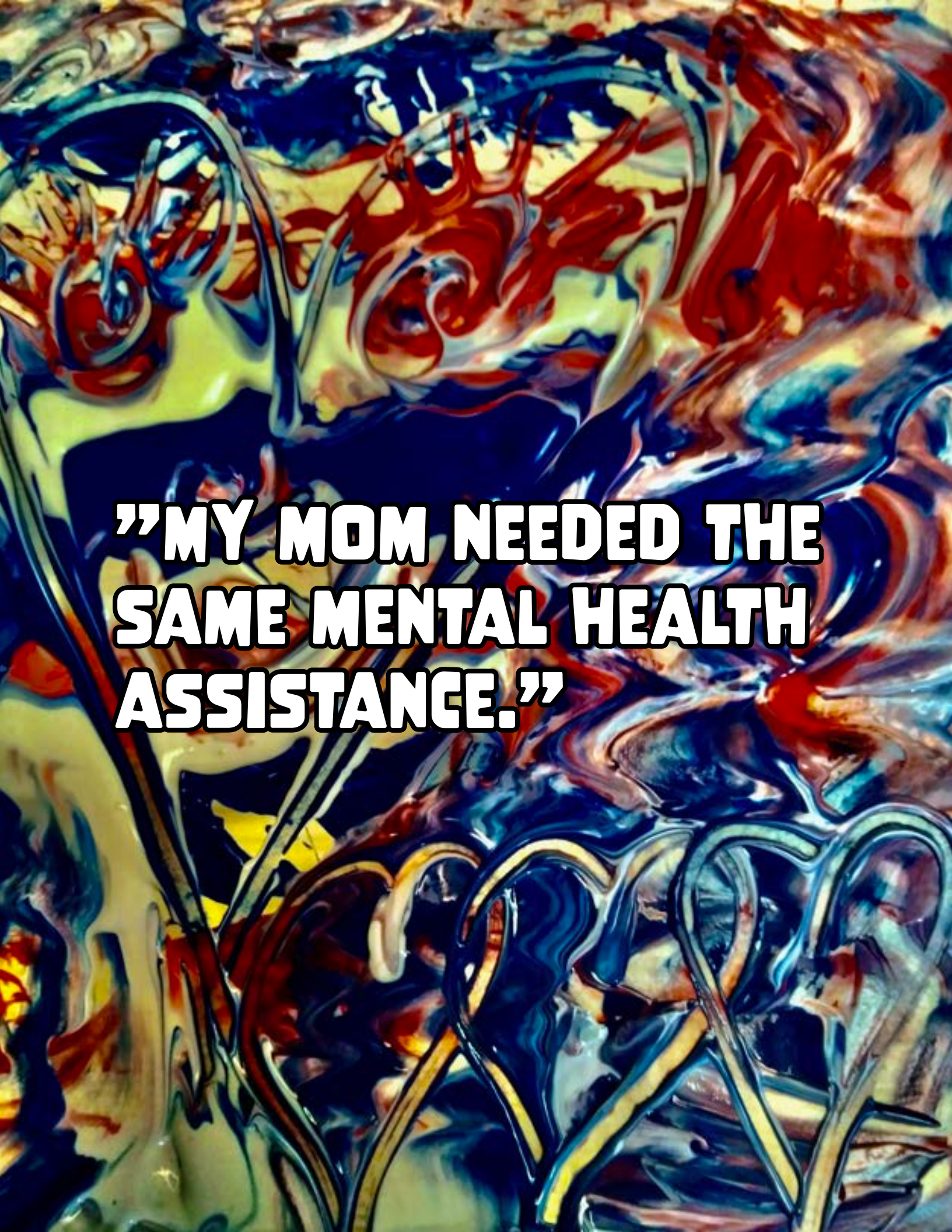
While growing up, many women surveyed lived with someone who had depression, struggled with their mental health , or attempted suicide. Of the women surveyed 52% shared that they lived with someone with a mental health condition. During their first 18 years of life, 58% of surveyed women described behavior of their parents, caregivers, or other adults in their household as emotionally and physically abusive and at times threatening to the point of fear.

Respondents of the survey and those involved in the interview process understood mental health within their families also impacted how their care providers were able to actually provide care to them. Some women described their care providers as individuals who themselves were experiencing and going through mental health crises. One participant described seeing her father, an ex-veteran, unable to communicate with family members while wielding a weapon and this incident is described as happening more than once.

"Motherhood Is
A Journey
That Teaches
You Life's
Best
Lessons"

Brasileira
Rosalinda
Sanchez
Santana



An abstract, high-contrast background featuring swirling patterns of blue, red, yellow, and white. A faint, stylized face is visible in the upper left quadrant, composed of the same swirling colors. The overall effect is one of intense, chaotic energy.

**"MY MOM NEEDED THE
SAME MENTAL HEALTH
ASSISTANCE."**

“I DO WANT TO SAY IT WAS CLOSER TO PTSD AND THE REASON I SAY THAT IS BECAUSE EVENTUALLY HE CAME OUT OF IT. BUT, MY MOM USED TO SAY THAT HE WOULD MAKE HER NERVOUS AND SHE WOULD TAKE ME TO MY GRANDPARENTS WHEN HE WOULD SIT ON THE COUCH AND JUST CLICK HIS GUN. IT’S LIKE HE WAS STILL TRYING TO SETTLE WHATEVER HAPPENED IN VIETNAM. “

Concurrently families and their caregivers were reported as having very little access to effective mental health care. Women spoke of needing and wanting treatment for themselves and their family members. This particular participant was actively asking for mental health services while identifying their mother’s need for services. This participant also explicitly identifies the lack of community based mental health services.

“I WAS ASKING FOR MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE AT 14 AND NOTHING, THAT SHIT DON’T EXIST. MY MOM NEEDED THE SAME MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE.”

The following participant’s story, however, reflects the documented pattern of Black girls being aggressively medicated at young ages:

“AS A CHILD YOU KNOW, THEY PUT ME ON A LOT OF MEDICINE, LITHIUM, TRILEPTAL BECAUSE I HAD DEPRESSION, BIPOLAR, HE [PHYSICIAN] DIAGNOSED ME WITH THAT WHEN I WAS 12. BUT THAT’S SOMETHING I WANTED TO STUDY BECAUSE I’M LIKE HOW CAN YOU PUT THAT MUCH MEDICINE INSIDE OF A CHILD, MY BRAIN’S NOT DEVELOPED, I’M GOING THROUGH TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES...”

Her concern mirrors national data showing a two- to three-fold rise in psychotropic prescribing for children in the 1990s, including lithium and other mood stabilizers (Zito et al., 2003). Black feminist scholars note that Black women’s trauma is routinely misinterpreted as pathology, resulting in over-treatment rather than care (Roberts, 1997).

When mental health treatment was received, Black families often faced the risk of being penalized, surveilled, or even separated. As one participant shared:

“WELL, MY MOM IS IN AND OUT OF STATE MENTAL HOSPITAL AND I WAS IN EMERGENCY FOSTER CARE THROUGH THE STATE AND THEN THE STATE SAID MY MOM, THE LAST TIME THAT SHE WENT, I THINK I WAS LIKE FIVE, DECIDED THAT THEY WEREN’T GOING TO ALLOW HER TO HAVE ME AND I GUESS SHE SIGNED THE RIGHTS OVER TO MY GRANDPA AND GRANDMA A LONG TIME AGO.”

Family separation at such a young age is a well-documented adverse childhood experience. Losing a primary attachment figure, especially through state intervention, can lead to long-term difficulties with emotional regulation, heightened stress responses, and challenges forming stable relationships. Black feminist scholars have shown that Black women are disproportionately punished when seeking mental health support, with child welfare and psychiatric systems working together to police and separate families rather than provide care (Roberts, 1997).

ENGINEERED UNCERTAINTY

Understanding how a woman enters into housing insecurity or homelessness requires a narrative change that refuses the conceptual framing of “behavioral dysfunction” or “bad choices.” Though interviewed women did speak of a process of destabilization occurring immediately before experiencing houselessness or entering the community of Skid Row, this cycle of confusion was caused by an external force. This external destabilization suggests that the confusion was produced by unreliable systems, structures, institutions, and relationships that present themselves as legitimate yet were positioned to exploit women’s vulnerability. This process functions as a form of administrative gaslighting—a bureaucratic environment in which institutional failure is reframed as individual deficiency. Women are told housing exists, that services are available, that help is coming, yet the promised outcomes repeatedly fail to materialize. The result is not confusion created by women themselves, but confusion produced by systems that operate through fragmentation, delay and misalignment.

For example, one participant described several moments when housing appeared secure, whether through websites advertising available units or through interpersonal relationships. Yet when the woman arrived expecting the housing they were promised, it was not available, and their money and resources were lost.

“SO, UM, SO I HAD GONE THROUGH A SERIES OF EXPERIENCES WHEN I MOVED FROM THE EAST COAST TO THE WEST COAST...AND PRETTY MUCH, I SENT MY FIRST MONTH, LAST MONTH, SECURITY DEPOSIT THROUGH A CRAIGSLIST POST. AND WHEN I ARRIVED IN TOWN, IT WAS A SCAM. “

She continues on by sharing that she took what money she had left and rented a space at a hostel. She acknowledges that she is struggling but has “faith” that things will turn out and even after she was “scammed” she looks to still “enjoy” life.

“SO THEN I HAD TO STAY IN A HOSTEL WHEN I ONLY HAD SO MUCH MONEY WITH ME BECAUSE I’M JUST LIKE I’M WALKING ON FAITH YOU KNOW. AND WHICH WAS, I STILL GOT TO ADVENTURE AND ENJOY MYSELF.”

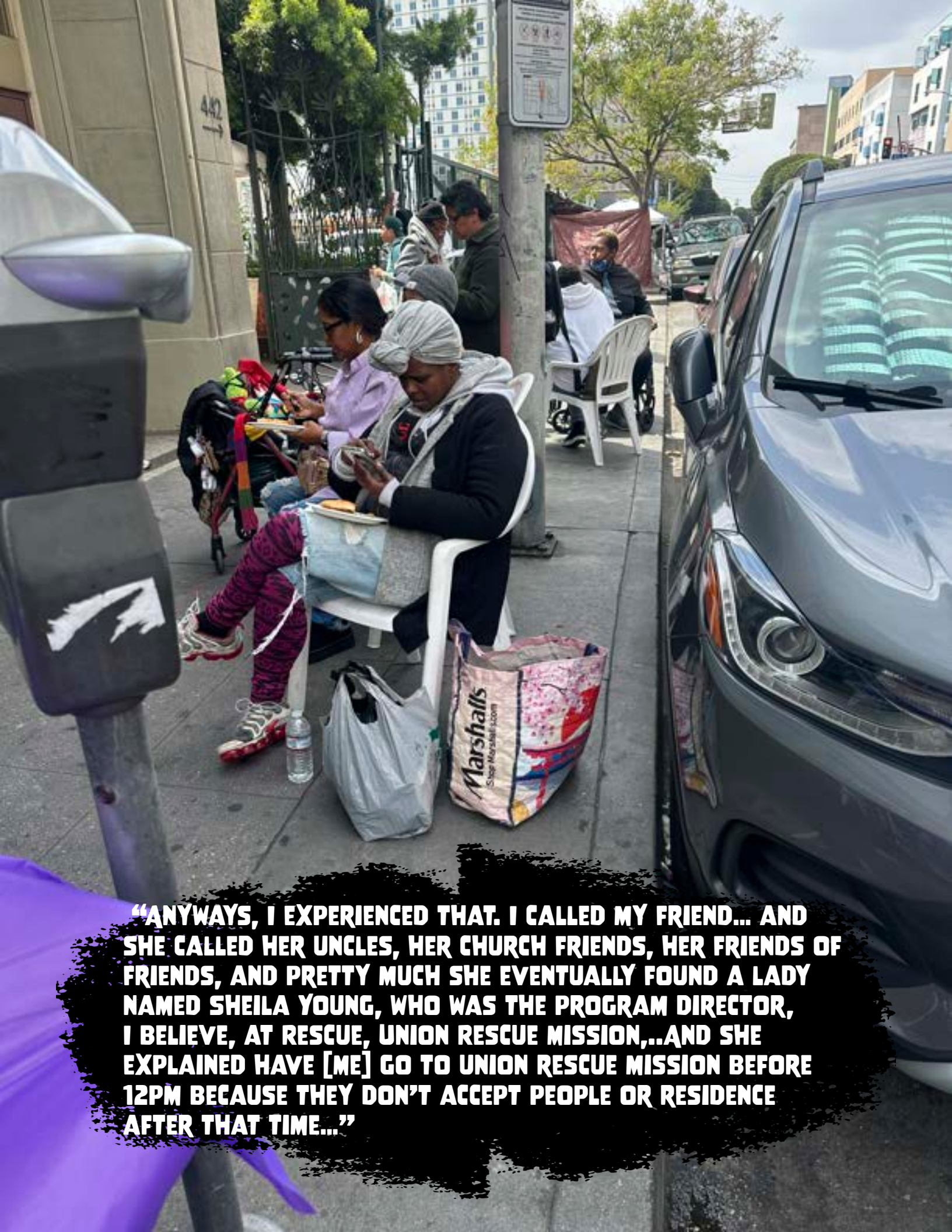
She then shares the series of events where people she had chosen to confide exploit her trust and steal her money.

“BUT THEN YOU KNOW I STARTED TO LIKE GO THROUGH A SERIES OF EXPERIENCES WHERE I ENDED UP IN MY FIRST, OR ONE OF MY EARLIER POSITIONS IN CALIFORNIA, AND YOU KNOW, I OPENED UP MY HEART TO THE LADY. SHE’S LIKE YOU COULD STAY IN THE BACK OF MY HOUSE. SHE STOLE MY FIRST \$2,000 CHECK, I WAS THEN SCAMMED AGAIN AND ROBBED AGAIN. SO SHE TOLD ME I HAD TO MOVE OUT AND SHE TOLD ME THAT I BROKE HER TOILET WHICH DIDN’T MAKE SENSE....”

Her stories have continual losses but also continual networking and strategizing to find housing so that she can enjoy her life. She eventually makes connection to the Union Rescue Mission and moves to Skid Row.



**I OPENED UP MY HEART
TO THE LADY. SHE'S
LIKE YOU COULD STAY IN
THE BACK OF MY HOUSE.
SHE STOLE MY FIRST
\$2,000 CHECK, I WAS
THEN SCAMMED AGAIN
AND ROBBED AGAIN.**



“ANYWAYS, I EXPERIENCED THAT. I CALLED MY FRIEND... AND SHE CALLED HER UNCLES, HER CHURCH FRIENDS, HER FRIENDS OF FRIENDS, AND PRETTY MUCH SHE EVENTUALLY FOUND A LADY NAMED SHEILA YOUNG, WHO WAS THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR, I BELIEVE, AT RESCUE, UNION RESCUE MISSION,..AND SHE EXPLAINED HAVE [ME] GO TO UNION RESCUE MISSION BEFORE 12PM BECAUSE THEY DON'T ACCEPT PEOPLE OR RESIDENCE AFTER THAT TIME...”

Women are not describing themselves as confused, unsure of their life trajectory, or uncertain about their identity. Rather, the situations unfolding around them created states of disbelief and confusion because what they were told would happen, or what was supposed to be available to them, did not materialize. This type of interpersonal misalignment disrupts trust in community networks but when it shows up in institutions meant to keep people housed it can exacerbate mistrust, harm, and danger for women.

This misalignment is not accidental. As Patricia Hill Collins and Dorothy Roberts argue, institutions, systems, and people that claim to offer protection and opportunity often produce harm through controlling narratives and administrative practices that obscure responsibility, requiring women to trust systems that withhold information and later recast institutional failure as personal deficiency. (Collins, 2000; Roberts, 2002). Identifying this misalignment is important because it is what produces disbelief, shock, and destabilization.

In 2024, public audits and media investigations intensified scrutiny of LAHSA's governance, transparency, and financial oversight, raising serious questions about its capacity to coordinate regional homelessness services (Associated Press, 2024). This instability is not procedural—it is lived. Women describe inconsistent case management, delayed placements, lost paperwork, and eligibility rules that shift without notice. Case managers, often overwhelmed by caseloads and administrative demands, fall short on follow-up and sustained engagement; bias—implicit or explicit—shapes who receives attention and who is quietly deprioritized. When oversight structures are under review, systems slow and grow even more bureaucratically defensive, lengthening wait times and narrowing accountability. The institutional disorder at the top cascades downward, reinforcing the misalignment women describe: promises made, access withheld, and responsibility diffused.

The dominant narrative suggests that women who live in or arrive at Skid Row come already “unstable.” However, it is the systems they engage with that discriminate against them and, in some cases, steal from them, that are the true source of destabilization. The following narratives reveal distinct and interconnected challenges of how external, unforeseen disruptions can transform into systematic failures, illustrating how events can rapidly destabilize women's lives.

One participant, for example, describes the injustices she experienced from her landlord:

“ I WAS NOT AWARE THAT I HAD SECTION 8 UM, I, BUT BEFORE HE GET TO EVICTING ME, HE CUT MY UTILITIES AND I CALLED THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING. SO DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING SENT ME A LETTER AND THEY SAID THAT I WAS IN SECTION 8, FOR, SINCE JUNE 24, 2021. AND THEN I WAS NOT AWARE. BUT THAT SECTION 8 STAY WITH THE HOUSE. SO THEY EVICTED ME,

**I DON'T HAVE A VOUCHER,
BECAUSE THAT SECTION 8
STAYS WITH THE PROPERTY.
SO THEY PUT ME IN THAT
PROGRAM. BUT THEY NEVER
TOLD ME, SO THE PROGRAM
THEY PUT ME OVER THERE.
AND THEY, THEY NEVER
MENTION TO ME, SO I FIND
OUT AFTER THE HOUSING
DEPARTMENT TOLD ME THAT
I WAS IN SECTION 8 AT THE
TIME THAT I GOT EVICTED.”**

Another participants experience demonstrates that a lack of transparency and administrative oversight by housing



"I'VE BEEN HERE FOR A YEAR AND FIVE MONTHS. I CAME MAY 5TH OF 2023. 2023. YEAH. I... LET ME SEE...I CAME HERE BECAUSE I... HAD BEEN EVICTED, I HAD AN APARTMENT, I WAS WORKING A JOB AND THEN COVID CAME..."

authorities leads to evictions.

She further explains that the new protocols enacted at her place of employment destabilized the work environment and further exacerbated the trauma of living through a pandemic that had already claimed hundreds of thousands of



"IT DIDN'T REALLY GET AS STRESSFUL UNTIL COVID HIT AND THERE WAS SO MUCH RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND PROTOCOL, AND THAT WAS WITH THE HIGHER UPS AND WITH THE PEOPLE WHO WERE BEING ASKED TO SUBMIT TO ALL THESE DIFFERENT CHANGES. AND THE FOLLOW THROUGH WAS JUST HORRIBLE... STAFF CHANGES, AND I JUST SAID I JUST CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE. "

lives.

She continues by explaining how she applied for and was a recipient of the COVID rental release program that helped for a while. As she attempted to figure out her next step the rental assistance program ended and like many people throughout LA County she was evicted and became houseless (Roy., 2020).

“SO A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD ME ABOUT A PROGRAM WHERE THEY WOULD, BECAUSE OF THE COVID SITUATION, TAKE CARE OF THE RENT, SO I PARTICIPATED IN THAT. SO IT GAVE ME SOME RELIEF FOR A WHILE BUT, IT DIDN’T LAST THAT LONG. I MEAN I DIDN’T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT RIGHT AWAY. SO, BY THE TIME I WAS READY TO LIKE FIGURE OUT SOMETHING ELSE, THAT THE PROGRAM ENDED BEFORE I WAS READY TO FIGURE OUT SOMETHING ELSE, THE PROGRAM WAS DONE. AND I MEAN THE APARTMENT– THE LANDLORDS NEED THEIR MONEY AND I DIDN’T HAVE IT TO GIVE THEM SO, I CAME HERE.”- P3



The emotional and physical impact of COVID-19 pandemic is rarely acknowledged and the consequential impact of the pandemic on employment and housing stability never reached enough significance among policymakers. Many people ended up houseless as a result of global pandemic and not as a result of poor planning or decision making (Roy, 2020).

Women, in many cases, were holding out and not moving forward in their lives because they were searching for a place to live that would respect their wishes and who they were as people—their identity. The “cycle of confusion” captures this struggle: the difficulty of finding a place to settle where one does not have to compromise any part of themselves.

Another participant, for example, described looking for a space that was self-organized and “sovereign,”



“OKAY SO BEFORE I MOVED TO PUERTO RICO MM-HMM I WAS LOOKING INTO UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES IN SOVEREIGNTY LIKE I WANT US TO START MY PAPERWORK ON DENOUNCING MYSELF. SO I WAS RESEARCHING IN SKID ROW BECAUSE SKID ROW IS AN UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITY. SO THAT’S WHAT I KNEW OF SKID ROW FROM LIKE A FEW ARTICLES THAT I READ....”P18

In a separate example, another woman sought a home that would accept her mental health needs and allow her to receive treatment without judgment

“I WENT BACK HOME. AND I’M LIKE, I START ADMITTING MY SITUATION [MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION] AND SHE [PARTICIPANTS MOTHER] SAID YOU ARE NOT, AND I SAY I CAN’T DO THIS, I CAN’T STAY HERE AND ALLOW YOU TO TELL ME WHAT I AM NOT FEELING AND WHAT I AM NOT GOING THROUGH. THAT I HAVE BEEN DENIED ALL MY LIFE. SO I SAID, “NEXT THING TO DO IS GOTTA GO DOWNTOWN.” SO THAT’S WHAT I DID.”



These experiences highlight how destabilizing it becomes when places referred to as “home” ultimately do not welcome the whole person as they identify. The confusion arises not from within the women but from the contradiction between what “home” promises and what it actually demands.

Women also understood themselves to be strong and competent, capable of moving through life challenges. Before transitioning into houselessness, there is often a moment of disbelief, disbelief that their lives could be so suddenly upended, or that situations could become so confusing despite their own clarity and motivation. This becomes apparent, as the participant describes, the way women do not give up but instead find any avenue and all motivation

“I ENDED UP GOING BACK TO, CAME FROM TEXAS HERE, ENDED UP GOING TO SACRAMENTO, THEN HAPPENED TO TURN AROUND AND COME BACK HERE AND IT’S A, I’M BEING VERY VAGUE BECAUSE MY CHILDREN ARE SITTING HERE, BUT IT WAS A VERY DEEP SITUATION THAT OCCURRED THAT TRANSPIRED FROM THE TIME I LEFT TEXAS AND CAME HERE, TO SACRAMENTO, THEN BACK HERE. SO IT’S JUST NOT, IT’S ALREADY SOMETHING I’VE PRAYED OVER AND USUALLY WHEN I’VE PRAYED ABOUT SOMETHING I’VE GIVEN SOMETHING TO GOD I DON’T LIKE TO GO BACK AND REOPEN IT AND REHASH IT AND TALK ABOUT IT AGAIN, BECAUSE ALL THOSE OLD FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS COME BACK UP AGAIN. SO I’VE ALREADY DEALT WITH THAT. BUT YEAH, IT WAS A DEEP SITUATION AND EVEN, EVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THAT WAS CONFUSING FOR ME, ‘CAUSE I COULDN’T UNDERSTAND HOW I GOT THERE, I COULDN’T EVEN BELIEVE THAT I WAS IN THAT PLACE AND JUST HAVE TO WORK THROUGH IT. CAN’T GIVE UP. CAN’T BE SO CONFUSED THAT I’M JUST SO...DEVASTATED THAT I CAN’T MAKE ANY EFFORT TO MOVE FORWARD. I HAVE TO MOVE FORWARD. I HAVE TO WORK THROUGH IT AND I HAVE TO KEEP GOING.”

to move forward.

Women experience confusion not because they lack direction, but because they are navigating a predatory and gaslighting system that weaponizes their vulnerability. They are searching for a home that does not require shrinking, hiding, or betraying themselves, yet the systems they encounter make that search dangerous, confusing, and destabilizing. What may appear from the outside as chaotic behavior is often a deliberate survival strategy within a violent and contradictory environment. Women are not stalled or confused, they are intentionally surviving in a system that punishes need, preys on vulnerability, and presents unsafe or exploitative options as “help.” These patterns and behaviors compound over time, eventually becoming a systemic response that creates a cycle. Punitive responses and actions become repetitive and eventually trap women in loops of abandonment, confusion, and survival instead of creating pathways that lead to stability.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN







Throughout the interview and focus group process women disclosed many incidents of violence occurring in their lives prior to coming to Skid Row. In fact these acts of violence contributed to growing instability in their lives, making them even more vulnerable to housing insecurity or homelessness. Black feminist scholars have long argued that violence against women, particularly Black women and other marginalized women must be understood as structurally produced by intertwining systems of racism, patriarchy, poverty, and policing (Collective, 2017). For example, racism limits access to public resources such as housing, healthcare, and protection; patriarchy normalizes male control and gendered violence; poverty can force women into unsafe relationships or environments. As an undocumented women described, her experience with homelessness was caused by her landlord who was stealing rent money from her and when confronted, he raped and evicted her:

“SO, AFTER HE [HER HUSBAND] DISAPPEARED I GET EVICTED. BUT BEFORE I GET EVICTED THE LANDLORD WAS... I WAS GETTING TO THAT PLACE THROUGH A PROGRAM, AND THEY NEVER TOLD ME THAT I WAS HAVING LIKE A SECTION 8, AND HE WAS COLLECTING SECTION 8 AND HE WAS COLLECTING REGULAR RENT FROM US, AND FOR LIKE ALMOST THREE YEARS. WHEN I FIND OUT, HE RAPED ME, HE PUT ME IN THE STREET WITH ALL MY FAMILY. AND THEN LIKE I STARTED HAVING ISSUES WITH MY FAMILY CAUSE MY KIDS STARTED TO... I WAS LYING TO THEM THAT I WAS NOT PAYING THE RENT OR I WAS STEALING THE MONEY FROM THEM, BUT I WAS NOT LIKE THAT. THIS GUY LIKE HE WAS COLLECTING LIKE SEX IN THE END, RIGHT? SO AFTER THAT, I BECOME HOMELESS AND I STARTED COMING TO THE WOMEN’S CENTER AND I HAVE BEEN LIKE IN THE STREETS...” P12

**“SO IT WAS THAT
PROCESS [MEDITATION]
AND WHEN HE WAS TRYING
TO INSERT HIMSELF INSIDE
OF ME, I DON’T EVEN
KNOW IF HE DID IT OR
NOT. BECAUSE I WAS STILL
TRYING TO COME OUT OF
THAT SPACE. AND WHEN
HE DID, I GUESS THAT’S
WHEN I CAME BACK. AND
I WAS LIKE GET OFF OF
ME, I WAS IN A PEACEFUL
SPACE. SO IT TOOK A
LONG WHILE FOR ME TO
ACTUALLY REALIZE THAT I
WAS RAPED.”- P18**



Knowing a woman who has experienced sexual and physical violence throughout their life is not uncommon. In fact nearly half of all women (45.1%) living in the United States have experienced sexual violence (Leemis et al., 2025). At the interpersonal level, women often experience sexual and physical violence by men who are a part of their everyday lives including intimate partners, employers, landlords, and law enforcement. Experiences of coercion, exploitation, and forced sexual labor are commonly reported incidents, particularly for women whose access to housing, income, or safety is already limited. These incidents of violence not only contribute to housing insecurity but psychologically impact women and their extended families. As one woman describes, she had been building a mentorship with a man who she thought was spiritual mentor but this mentor used her trust to rape her. Below she describes her actions taken to stop the rape but never the less it was rape.



**“CAME DOWN
HERE AND THEY
GAVE ME AN
APARTMENT
ON 7TH STREET
FIRST, BUT I
WENT TO JAIL
AND LOST IT.”
- P19**

Institutional violence enhances this harm to Black and brown women. For women who spent time in prisons, jails, psychiatric facilities, hospitals, foster care systems, or mandated treatment programs - this resulted in loss of resources and community relationships. When released from these systems women find that their housing placements have been terminated, their belongings discarded, their documents lost, and their social networks disrupted. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes this process as organized abandonment, wherein the state withdraws the conditions necessary for survival while expanding systems of punishment and control (Gilmore, 2007).

“AND SO I CAME DOWNTOWN GOT HELP, GOT WHAT I NEEDED BECAUSE I COULDN'T AFFORD TO GET MY OWN PLACE AND I DID SIGN UP FOR SAMMY, FOR SECTION 8 AND I AM STILL ON THAT LIST. I HAVE WENT TO THE MENTAL, I GOT SICK AND I WENT BACK THEY HAD ALREADY GIVEN OUT VOUCHERS FOR SIGNING YOU UP FOR THE SECTION 8 ...” - P17



Women spoke about navigating systems seeking help, serving time in penitentiaries, and confronting aggressors that were attempting to harm them. When women sought support from public institutions or served time after arrest they, however, returned to living conditions that were destabilized by their lack of presence, often losing resources such as housing and family relationships that were already difficult to obtain or highly strained.

One participant describes how her need to receive psychiatric in-patient treatment resulted in her losing her place in line to receive rental support. Understanding how these systems intersect helps us understand that Black women and women of color in particular experience violence differently than white women or Black men because their identity sits at the intersection of multiple oppressions. Because of this lack of intersectional analysis women of color and Black women are intentionally excluded from systems that chose to not understand overlapping identities.

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TRANSITION: HOMELESSNESS INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Imagine being lost at sea and the paddle that they're leading you to land with is an illusion. That's the homelessness industrial complex (Perez, 2025). Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, law enforcement and other entities benefiting from homelessness because it improves their bank accounts; creating a system where homelessness is sustained not demolished.

The persistence of homelessness in Los Angeles cannot be understood solely as a failure of policy design; it must also be examined as an economic system. Billions of public dollars now circulate through nonprofit organizations, contractors, shelters, security services, and government agencies tasked with managing homelessness. The overall funding architecture rewards program expansion, service provision, and administrative growth rather than permanent housing outcomes. Homelessness becomes a sustained condition rather than a crisis to be resolved. Programs expand, contracts multiply, and new initiatives are launched, yet the number of people remaining unhoused remains largely unchanged. Survey data reinforces this: respondents reported years of engagement with services without housing outcomes, cycling through shelters, programs, and temporary placements while remaining unhoused. This hallmark of the homeless industrial complex—perpetual management without resolution—embodies what Saidiya Hartman describes as the violence and reproduction of domination under the guise of care (Hartman, 1997).

Data collected for this report makes it clear that most women are not newly unhoused, nor are they disconnected from services. What women describe with their words, the data confirms with precision: this system does not resolve homelessness—it perpetuates and manages it. Across the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, LAHSA estimates 22,411 women and girls experienced homelessness in February 2025 (about 10,429 sheltered and 11,982 unsheltered), underscoring a countywide gendered crisis that Skid Row is forced to absorb and make visible (LAHSA, 2025).

Among women aged 30–49, nearly half (49%) reported being without a home of their own for three years or more. For women aged 50 and older, that number rises to 55%. These are not transitional periods. They are prolonged conditions of instability that stretch across adulthood, health changes, caregiving responsibilities, and survival itself.

43% OF WOMEN AGED 30–49, REPORTED CURRENTLY LIVING HOUSELESS—ON THE STREET, IN VEHICLES, OR IN SIMILARLY UNSTABLE CONDITIONS

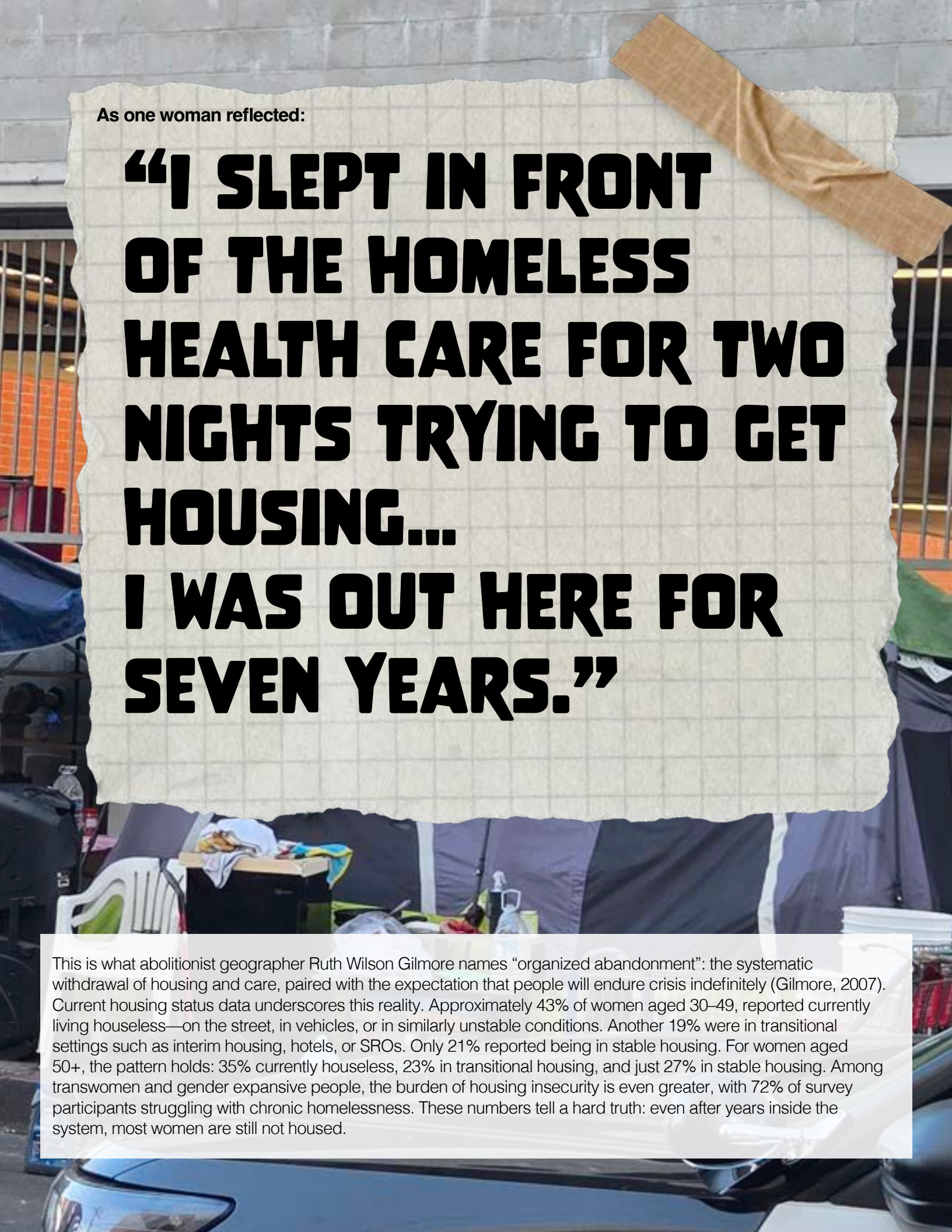
19% WERE IN TRANSITIONAL SETTINGS SUCH AS INTERIM HOUSING, HOTELS, OR SROS.

ONLY 21% REPORTED BEING IN STABLE HOUSING.

FOR WOMEN AGED 50+: 35% CURRENTLY HOUSELESS, 23% IN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING, AND JUST 27% IN STABLE HOUSING.

AMONG TRANSWOMEN AND GENDER EXPANSIVE PEOPLE, THE BURDEN OF HOUSING INSECURITY IS EVEN GREATER, WITH 72% OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS STRUGGLING WITH CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS.





As one woman reflected:

**“I SLEPT IN FRONT
OF THE HOMELESS
HEALTH CARE FOR TWO
NIGHTS TRYING TO GET
HOUSING...
I WAS OUT HERE FOR
SEVEN YEARS.”**

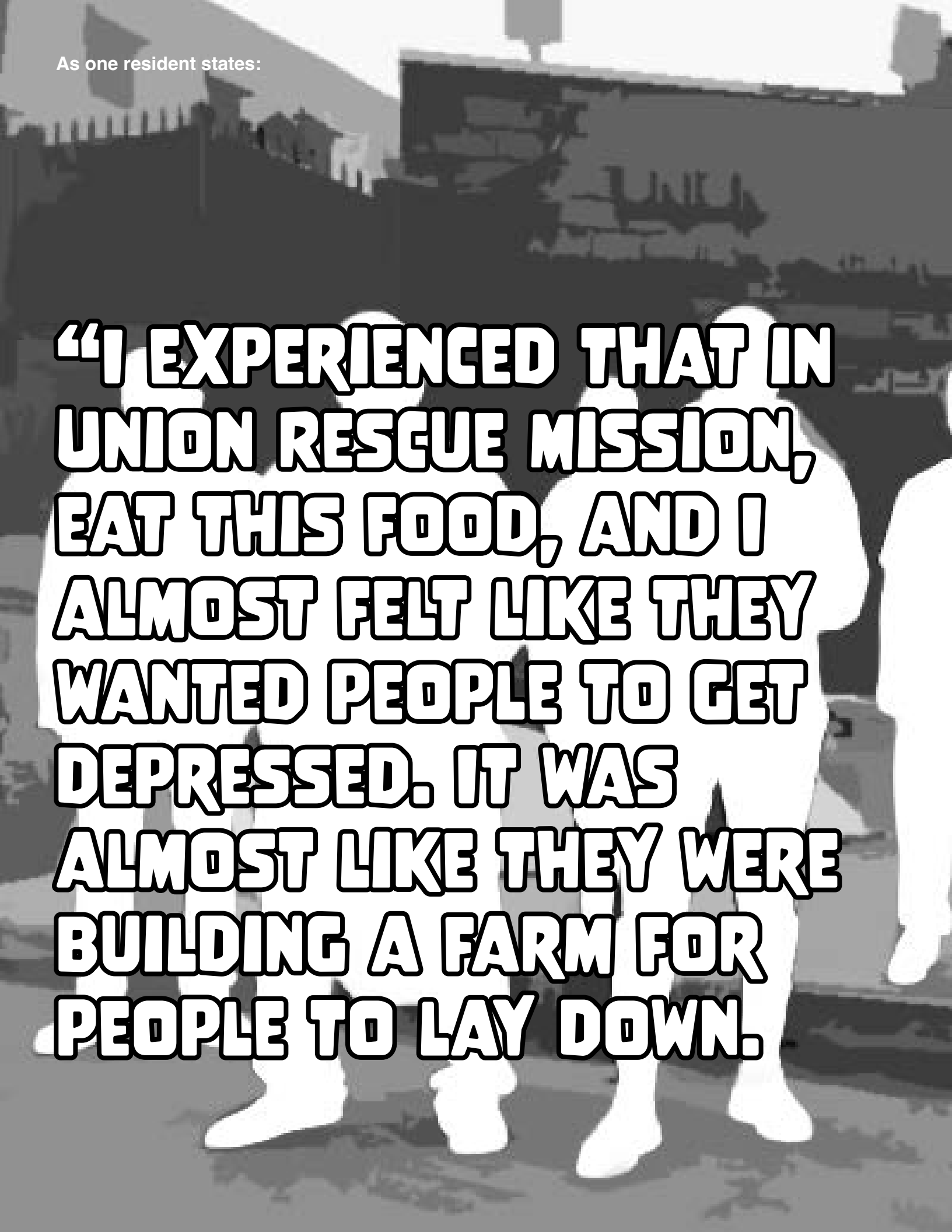
This is what abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore names “organized abandonment”: the systematic withdrawal of housing and care, paired with the expectation that people will endure crisis indefinitely (Gilmore, 2007). Current housing status data underscores this reality. Approximately 43% of women aged 30–49, reported currently living houseless—on the street, in vehicles, or in similarly unstable conditions. Another 19% were in transitional settings such as interim housing, hotels, or SROs. Only 21% reported being in stable housing. For women aged 50+, the pattern holds: 35% currently houseless, 23% in transitional housing, and just 27% in stable housing. Among transwomen and gender expansive people, the burden of housing insecurity is even greater, with 72% of survey participants struggling with chronic homelessness. These numbers tell a hard truth: even after years inside the system, most women are still not housed.

Women spoke openly about the emotional toll of this endless waiting:

**“YOU CAN GET A
PLATE. YOU CAN GET A
SHOWER. BUT AS FAR
AS GETTING HOUSING
EXCLUSIVELY, IT’S
GONNA TAKE LONGER...
THEY DON’T CALL
YOU.”**

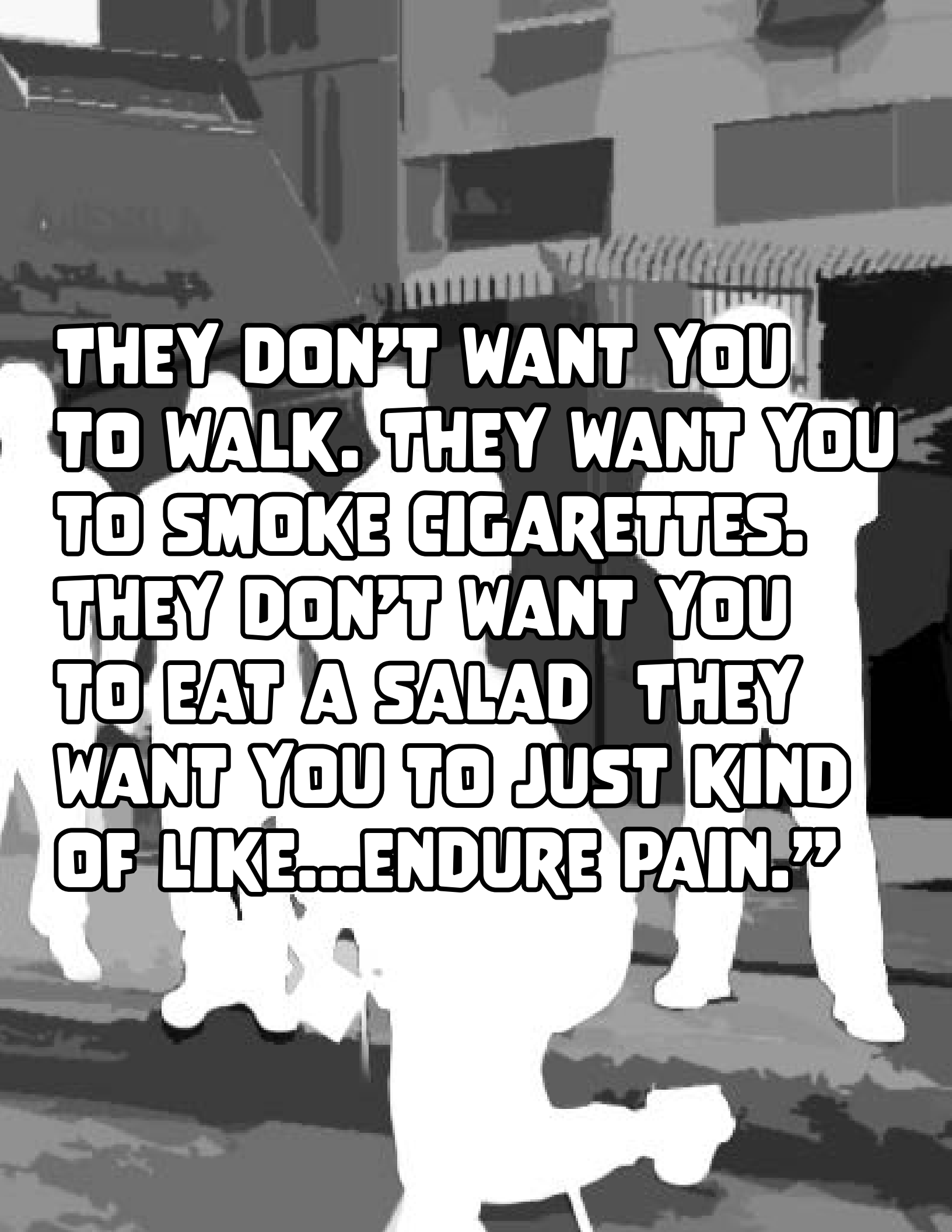
What is offered is not stability but suspension: a life lived in constant motion, constant adaptation, constant precarity—where survival is normalized and stability is made unreachable. When women were asked about the biggest barriers to accessing stable housing, their answers overwhelmingly pointed to structural conditions. While navigating homelessness in Skid Row, Women are forced to depend on shelters, like the Union Rescue Mission or Weingart for their basic needs and personal safety. These shelters offer them a bed or room under the guise of helping women “get back on their feet” but are actually only profiting off their poverty. In practice, this support is often extremely conditional and governed by rigid rules, constant surveillance, and punitive regulations that infantilize and criminalize unhoused women rather than empower them. Leading to women in skid row opting out of shelters so they can maintain their autonomy. “





As one resident states:

**“I EXPERIENCED THAT IN
UNION RESCUE MISSION,
EAT THIS FOOD, AND I
ALMOST FELT LIKE THEY
WANTED PEOPLE TO GET
DEPRESSED. IT WAS
ALMOST LIKE THEY WERE
BUILDING A FARM FOR
PEOPLE TO LAY DOWN.**

A black and white photograph of a crowd of people walking, possibly in a protest or a public gathering. The image is heavily stylized with high contrast, making the figures appear as dark shapes against a lighter background. The text is overlaid in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, centered in the upper half of the image.

**THEY DON'T WANT YOU
TO WALK. THEY WANT YOU
TO SMOKE CIGARETTES.
THEY DON'T WANT YOU
TO EAT A SALAD THEY
WANT YOU TO JUST KIND
OF LIKE...ENDURE PAIN."**



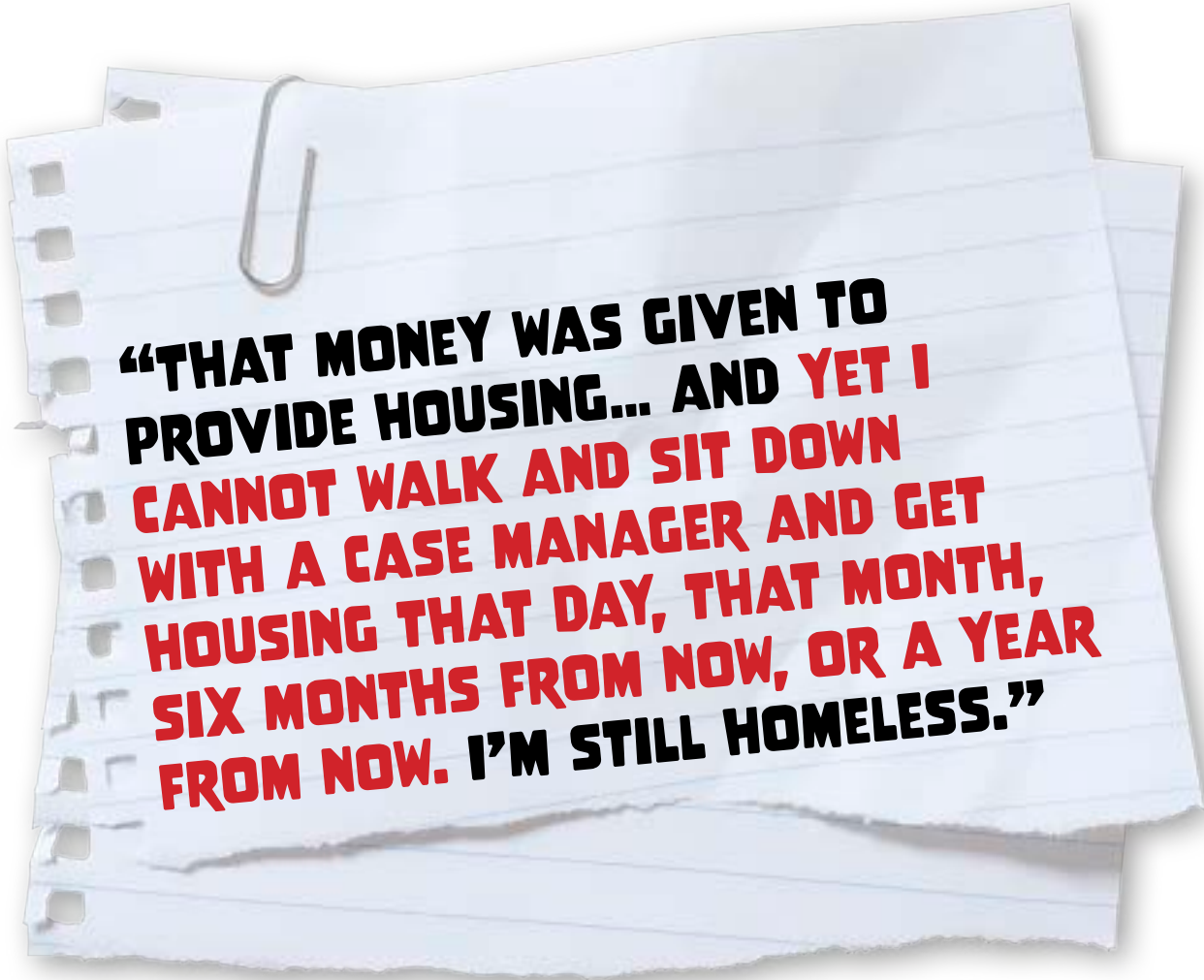
This results in unhoused women feeling unsupported and neglected when they need care the most. To understand the barriers women face in securing stable housing, it is important to first explain how the shelter-to-housing system typically operates. A young woman or adult woman often enters the system while unhoused, actively searching for a shelter placement as an initial step toward stability. Locating an available bed can take anywhere from a single night to several days or even weeks, depending on shelter capacity and eligibility requirements. Women in Skid Row who are waiting for shelter are experiencing heightened anxiety, chronic stress, and worsening mental, emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual health. Many report that the system shows little concern for their overall well-being and does not handle their lives or stability with care. Women also expressed frustration with the shelter system's inability to provide timely placement. These delays and lack of responsiveness lead some women to reject the shelter system altogether and seek alternative, nontraditional forms of housing.

For women with children, the impact is even more devastating. There are extremely limited family-centered resources in the Skid Row area, with Union Rescue Mission being one of the only options. As a result, many parents decline participation in the shelter system to avoid surveillance and the risk of Child Protective Services involvement. To remain with their children, some choose to live in tents or RVs rather than enter a system they fear could separate their families. Women repeatedly described the housing system as a maze—one that requires constant self-advocacy, navigation across untrained, overwhelmed or apathetic case managers, and endless compliance without results.

Securing a shelter placement does not equate to immediate access to permanent housing. In many cases, women remain in shelters for six months to a year or longer before being offered transitional or permanent housing(which highlights the lack of housing availability), with timelines heavily influenced by income status and program rules. While women are often told that having a job will expedite their housing placement, this is frequently not the reality. Employment can trigger additional scrutiny, including extensive documentation requirements, income verification, and retroactive employment histories, which can significantly delay progress.

“IT’S LIKE A MAZE, AND IT SHOULD NOT BE A MAZE BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE THEY’RE CHOOSING TO POUR ALL THEIR MONEY... BUT TO GET THAT HELP, IT’S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.”





**“THAT MONEY WAS GIVEN TO
PROVIDE HOUSING... AND YET I
CANNOT WALK AND SIT DOWN
WITH A CASE MANAGER AND GET
HOUSING THAT DAY, THAT MONTH,
SIX MONTHS FROM NOW, OR A YEAR
FROM NOW. I’M STILL HOMELESS.”**

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As a result, the burden of navigating the housing process falls disproportionately on the individual seeking housing. Women are expected to complete extensive paperwork, track documentation, and repeatedly advocate for themselves, while receiving limited guidance or proactive support from agencies with access to resources. Information about housing pathways is often unclear or inconsistently communicated, creating further barriers. Some other barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing include past evictions, criminal records, bad credit, and staff abuse of authority. Let’s take a closer look at Staff abuse of authority which is very prevalent in Shelters like the URM. An example of this barrier is when staff dismiss or escalate moments of vulnerability, treating requests for help as behavioral problems rather than signs of need. Or if we go deeper, staff can be the main deciding factor in whether you get housing or not and how fast you get housed.

This dynamic can discourage women from pursuing employment altogether, as earning income may complicate or slow their housing process. For some, relying on government assistance such as SSI becomes a more viable option than seeking work, simply to avoid prolonged delays or disqualification. While this may not be recognized as a systemic issue by those outside the process, it has significant consequences, reinforcing dependency and limiting economic mobility rather than supporting long-term stability.

**AMONG WOMEN AGED 30–49:**

*50% cited housing being unaffordable
34% cited a lack of available housing
22% cited discrimination
44% cited unemployment
26% identifying underemployment.*

AMONG WOMEN AGED 50+:

*56% cited unaffordable
housing
38% cited lack of availability
33% cited discrimination.*

Another critical component of the housing crisis is the severe lack of availability and affordability. In Downtown Los Angeles, the cost of living has reached destabilizing levels, particularly given the poor quality of much of the existing housing stock. Many single-room occupancy (SRO) units and studio apartments are dilapidated, outdated, and have not been renovated in decades, yet they are routinely offered to people who are already economically marginalized or in poverty.

Even for housed residents, many women in this report expressed that affordability is increasingly out of reach. Many Americans are forced to work two or three jobs simply to cover rent—often without enough income left to pay for groceries, utilities, transportation, or other basic necessities required to sustain daily life. When rent alone consumes the majority of one's income, stability becomes fragile at best.

Viewed through the lens of someone experiencing homelessness—perhaps working, yet still unable

to secure or maintain housing—the implications are devastating. It signals that employment alone is no longer a pathway to stability, dignity, or safety. Instead, it reflects a housing system that is structurally inaccessible, one that punishes poverty and leaves people trapped in cycles of uncertainty with little opportunity to recover or move forward.

Among women aged 30–49: 50% cited housing being unaffordable; 34% cited a lack of available housing; 22% cited discrimination and; 44% cited unemployment, with another 26% identifying underemployment. Among women aged 50+: 56% cited unaffordable housing; 38% cited lack of availability and; 33% cited discrimination.

These findings directly challenge dominant narratives that frame homelessness as a problem of motivation or compliance. Women are not failing to access housing because they are unwilling—they are being priced out, locked out, and excluded. .



RAND DATA ON UNHOUSED YOUTH:

- **63% UNEMPLOYMENT WITH THE AVERAGE MEDIAN INCOME AT \$450**
- **31% WERE ON GENERAL RELIEF**
- **59% ON FOOD ASSISTANCE**

THESE FINDINGS DIRECTLY CHALLENGE DOMINANT NARRATIVES THAT FRAME HOMELESSNESS AS A PROBLEM OF MOTIVATION OR COMPLIANCE. WOMEN ARE NOT FAILING TO ACCESS HOUSING BECAUSE THEY ARE UNWILLING—THEY ARE BEING PRICED OUT, LOCKED OUT, AND EXCLUDED.

YOUNGER WOMEN (18-28)

Younger women are entering homelessness earlier in life and often remain unhoused for extended periods before reaching adulthood. Their experiences reveal how housing instability, foster care involvement, family separation, and economic exclusion are reproducing homelessness across generations rather than interrupting it.

During the survey we were only able to survey five younger women between the ages of 18-29. Though this was an extremely small number to build generalizations from, we still felt it necessary to tell the story of these younger women. At the time of this survey, all five of these women were houseless and with only one placed into interim housing.

To put our data into context we did a comparative analysis to a RAND study that surveyed 399 young (male and female) people experiencing homelessness (18-24yrs.) (Hunter et al., 2024). The RAND report separated out this age group by those who had a history of foster care and those who were never placed in foster care. Of those youth in foster care 57% reported being houseless for more than six months and of those who did not experience foster care, 50% reported the same amount of time experiencing homelessness (Hunter et al., 2024). In a slightly consistent manner, of the five women DWAC surveyed, four women had spent at least one year unhoused and the other woman had been houseless for at least six months. Four of these younger women had a history of being houseless before the age of 18.

More importantly all five of DWAC interviewees reported unaffordable and unavailable housing and unemployment as the cause of homelessness. Overall in our report, as previously noted, 84% of the total women surveyed by DWAC reported the same lack of available and affordable housing as contributing factors toward homelessness. This of course was exacerbated by these 65% of these same women reporting underemployment and unemployment. According to the RAND report, younger adults reported 63% unemployment with the average median income at \$450; while 31% were on general relief, and 59% on food assistance (Hunter et al., 2024).

Looking at our DWAC survey three younger women received government subsidies. One younger woman was a sex worker, four reported receiving money from friends and family and working other odd jobs. During the last 12 months all five reported a time when they went without eating because they did not have money and all reported they were experiencing hunger at that time. All these five women reported that they had gone at least one day without eating because they did not have money. Young adults deserve more care and opportunities to be safe, housed, and fed.

NAVIGATING HOUSING

Women living in Skid Row are often forced to navigate between substandard housing and no housing at all. Even when women secure housing, it is often unstable and unsafe. Among women aged 30–49 who responded to questions about landlord behavior: 48% reported landlords refusing to make repairs; 31% reported harassment; 23% reported unauthorized entry and; 17% reported having belongings removed.

These practices actively destabilize housing and push women back into homelessness. One woman described being forcibly removed after paying rent, threatened by armed security, and left on the street with her belongings: ***“They get a kick out of kicking people out when you least expect it... now I’m crying in the middle of Skid Row with nowhere to go.”***

This statement exemplifies how structural violence and sudden, retaliatory eviction strips women of stability and inflicts emotional harm, leaving them humiliated and destabilized. Beyond the immediate loss of shelter, these experiences produce a deeper form of alienation and dehumanization. Women described being treated not as tenants or residents with rights, but as disposable occupants whose presence could be revoked at any moment. The removal of belongings, unauthorized entry into private space, and refusal to complete basic repairs communicates a clear message: that their safety, dignity, and well-being are not worthy of protection. In these moments, housing ceases to function as a site of stability and instead becomes another arena where women must defend their basic humanity.

The absence of care within these encounters is striking. Women often reported that when they attempted to assert their rights—requesting repairs, questioning illegal eviction practices, or asking for basic respect—they were met with intimidation, retaliation, or indifference. Landlords, property managers, and security personnel wield significant power over people already living on the margins, and that power is frequently exercised without accountability. The result is a housing environment where women learn that speaking up may lead to further punishment rather than protection.

These dynamics reproduce a constant sense of precarity. Even when women manage to secure a room or apartment, the threat of sudden displacement lingers. Housing becomes conditional, fragile, and easily withdrawn. Rather than functioning as a pathway out of homelessness, substandard and exploitative housing arrangements often act as a revolving door—pushing women back into homelessness through instability, harassment, and neglect. For many women in Skid Row, the question is not simply how to obtain housing, but how to find housing where they are treated as human beings worthy of safety, privacy, and care. Until those conditions exist, housing insecurity will continue to be reproduced not only by economic scarcity but by everyday practices of exclusion and disregard.

Among women aged 30–49 who experienced poor living conditions—such as mold, pests, lack of kitchens, or unsafe environments—only 43% reported those conditions to an authority. Among women aged 50+, just 39% did. The reasons women gave for not reporting are as telling as the numbers themselves: fear of retaliation, lack of knowledge about the process, lack of support from caseworkers, and a belief that nothing would change.

As one woman shared:

“NOBODY BELIEVES ME. I’VE BEEN VOCAL.”

Another explained why silence felt safer than advocacy:

“I didn’t want to cause problems... I was grateful for housing.”

This is not apathy. It is survival under coercive conditions—what scholars of the nonprofit and housing systems describe as gratitude enforced by precarity (Smith, 2008). Women are unhoused for years at a time, cycling through temporary and unsafe options, blocked by cost, scarcity, and discrimination and, afraid to report harm for fear of losing what little they have. Data in this report reveals a system that does not lack information, funding, or engagement. It lacks commitment to permanence and dignity. Homelessness for women in Skid Row is not a personal failure—it is a documented policy outcome. If policy produced this reality, then policy—rooted in housing as a human right, accountability, and women’s self-determination—can be transformed to end it.

As one woman said plainly:

**“JUST BECAUSE
SOMEONE IS HOMELESS
DOES NOT MEAN THEY
ARE WORTHLESS.”**

Homelessness for women in Skid Row is not a personal failure—it is a documented policy outcome. If policy produced this reality, then policy—rooted in housing as a human right, accountability, and women’s self-determination—can be transformed to end it.

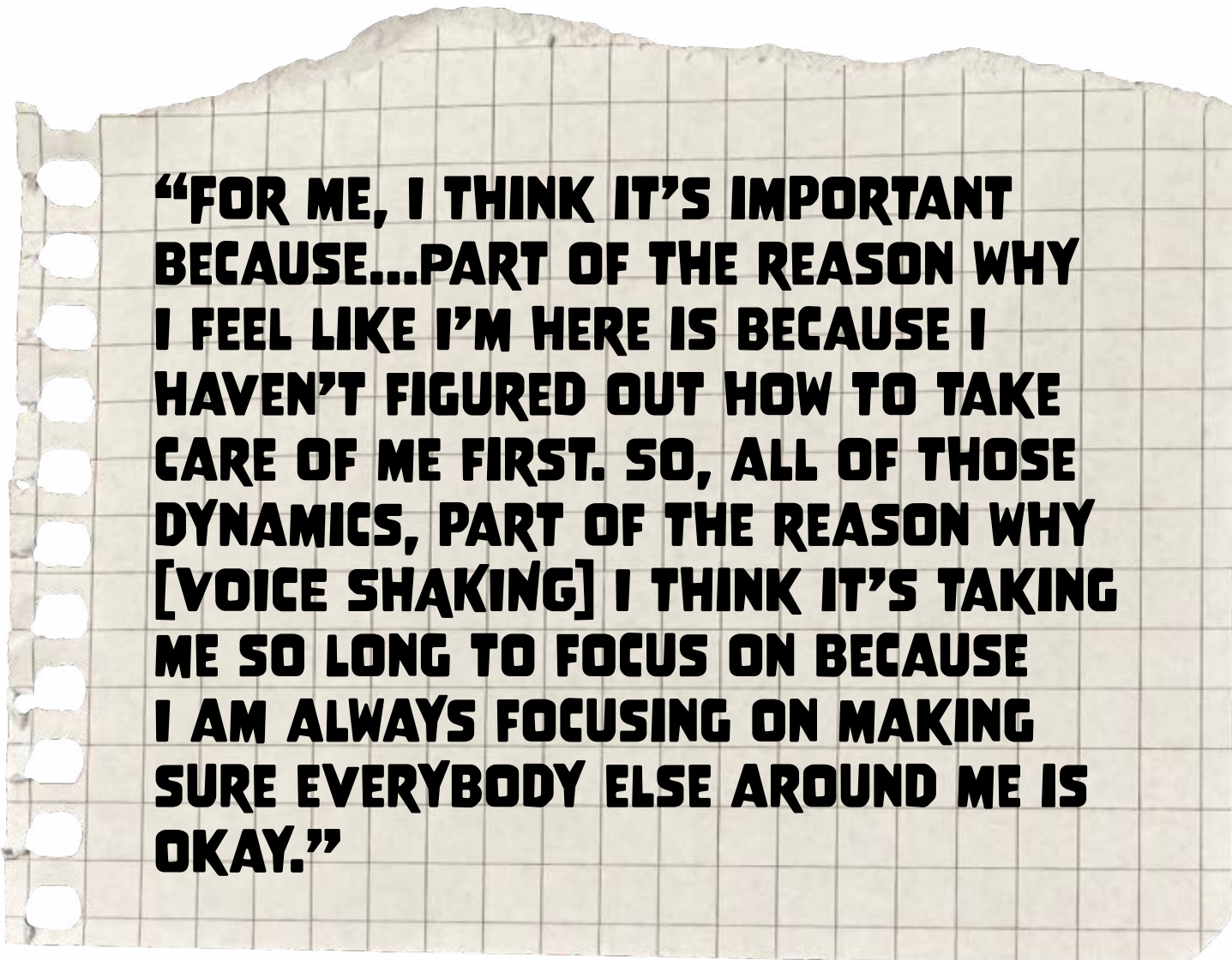
DURING TIME IN SKID ROW: REASONS FOR ARRIVING AND STAYING IN SKID ROW





Women do not come to or stay in Skid Row because something is wrong with them, which can be easily misconstrued and attributed to the stigma associated with living in Skid Row. In reality, women come and stay because the system targets, criminalizes, and abandons them, directly challenging the misconceptions provides a more layered reality. Arriving in Skid Row represents the culmination of multiple displacements—evictions, family conflict, system contact, and economic instability—occurring over time. Yet arrival also intersects with forms of relational survival. In contrast to neighborhoods that exclude or police them, Skid Row offers social networks, mutual care, and a degree of belonging that women describe as essential for survival.

Understanding this distinction is critical. Women are not choosing homelessness; they are choosing the relational environments that allow them to survive within it. Skid Row's margins offer belonging, identity, and survival networks that other communities deny. One participant shared her experience:



“FOR ME, I THINK IT’S IMPORTANT BECAUSE...PART OF THE REASON WHY I FEEL LIKE I’M HERE IS BECAUSE I HAVEN’T FIGURED OUT HOW TO TAKE CARE OF ME FIRST. SO, ALL OF THOSE DYNAMICS, PART OF THE REASON WHY [VOICE SHAKING] I THINK IT’S TAKING ME SO LONG TO FOCUS ON BECAUSE I AM ALWAYS FOCUSING ON MAKING SURE EVERYBODY ELSE AROUND ME IS OKAY.”

This quote from acknowledges that being in Skid Row is not only restricted to external circumstances but also extends to internal struggles, such as the ability to prioritize self-care. It also highlights the dynamics of self-preservation, and boundaries can be compromised to support others, exposing another layer of vulnerability. The experience of women who arrive and stay in Skid Row is complex, intertwining with multiple, relational factors such as interpersonal, psychological, and systemic failures.

Many women's arrival and decisions to remain in Skid Row are often intertwined with seeking housing, medical care, safety, and stability.

"I DIDN'T CHOOSE SKID ROW. MY CASEWORKER TOLD ME THE CECIL WAS ACCEPTING THE SECTION 8 VOUCHERS. SO I DIDN'T CHOOSE IT; SHE CHOSE IT FOR ME AND SHE HAD ME GOT OFF THE STREET."

Yet women also describe arriving and staying because Skid Row offers what other spaces refuse them: the ability to maintain family cohesion, live according to their identity, and receive forms of everyday kindness generated through collective struggle that appeared to be missing in their prior neighborhoods. While Skid Row is often portrayed only as chaotic or unsafe, women speak of an undercurrent that feels like home or a path to home. As a participant describes in the quote below, she chose to stay in Skid Row to be closer to her daughter who was in a residential facility. She goes as far as asking her children to choose between staying in Skid Row and struggling through homelessness or going home. Their response to stay and fight for their sister is an example of why women stay in Skid Row.

“EVEN THOUGH THAT WAS A ROUND-TRIP TICKET I COULDN’T LEAVE. I WOULD RATHER BE HOMELESS HERE AND STRUGGLE AND BUILD MYSELF BACK UP FOR MY DAUGHTER...I’M NOT GONNA BE ABLE TO DO IT RIGHT AWAY, BUT I KNOW I’M GONNA DO IT. I’M GONNA GET US OUT OF THAT SITUATION, BUT I NEED YOU GUYS [HER CHILDREN] TO KNOW I NEED TO KNOW IF YOU’RE GONNA STICK IT OUT WITH ME, IF THAT’S SOMETHING YOU’RE WILLING TO DO?” THEY SAID “MOM WE’VE BEEN SPENDING OUR WHOLE LIVES WITH YOU. MY SISTER, DIDN’T GET NOTHING BUT ONE YEAR WITH YOU, AND SHE NEEDS YOU TOO. SO WE’RE GONNA BE HERE WITH YOU THROUGH ALL OF IT. WE DON’T WANNA GO HOME, WE WANNA SEE HER TOO” (CRYING). AND WHEN THEY SAID THAT, IT PUSHED ME EVEN MORE. IT PUSHED ME EVEN MORE TO FIGHT FOR MY CHILD”

Women do not simply “end up” in Skid Row. They are pushed, evicted from unstable housing, denied access to public systems, and policed out of other neighborhoods. Their arrival reflects the long arc of structural abandonment rather than individual choice or personal failure. As one woman put it, “Growing up low income does a lot.” Her reflection shows how arrival in Skid Row is often the continuation of a life shaped by racialized poverty, restricted opportunity, and systemic neglect across generations. Skid Row becomes a place where women can exist as a poor person and find a pocket to rest and recuperate. Below she continues to elaborate how they navigated Skid Row and found shelters and organizations to help her on her journey to reclaim her daughter. She even describes finding a safer place in front of Downtown Women’s Center where rest and recuperation were better accessible.

“THERE IS A LIST THAT I HAD FOR SHELTERS AND PLACES, ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELPED WITH HOMELESS SERVICES AND I STUMBLED UPON THE DOWNTOWN WOMEN’S CENTER ONE MORNING AND ME AND MY CHILDREN WENT THERE AND I SAW THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO PITCH TENTS AND THINGS”

As another participant describes, her mothers struggle with substance use led her to move away from her family and seek shelter at the “Weingart” in Skid Row. Dominant views around substance use attribute use among poor people of color as a moral choice and not one that is better explained by lack of resources and criminalization.

“ I HEARD HER MENTION IT IN PASSING. BUT SHE WAS DEEP INTO HER ADDICTION AT THAT TIME. SO I DON’T THINK SHE WAS... NOT ONLY WAS SHE DEEP INTO HER ADDICTION, MY GRANDPARENTS HAD A ROOM FOR HER. SO SHE HAD A PLACE TO STAY, BUT SHE COULDN’T DO THE DRUGS SHE WANTED TO DO IN MY GRANDPARENTS HOUSE SO SHE WOULD LEAVE. AND SHE MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT WEINGART BUT I DON’T... SHE WASN’T STAYING IN WEINGART AT THAT TIME. ”

These forces did not disperse people; they funneled them.

“WELL, I KNEW ABOUT SKID ROW BECAUSE I HAD PEOPLE THAT WAS DOWN HERE FROM MY NEIGHBORHOOD.”

Skid Row became a place where displaced Black families, neighbors, and family networks regrouped, survived, and cared for one another when the rest of the city shut them out. Family dynamics, identity, and personal histories also influence women’s movement into Skid Row. Some leave homes where their identities or behaviors were constrained; others are pushed out by addiction, domestic conflict, or moral restrictions in religious or family settings.

As one woman remembered about her relative:

**“SO I WAS LIKE IT’S TIME
AND PLUS, LIKE I WANT TO
WANNA LIVE HERE. SO THRU
ENDED UP LEAVING UM... SO
MY MOM KICKED ME OUT B
KNOW I WAS QUEER. AND T
FELT...”**

Even as women describe generational trauma, poverty, violence, and criminalization, they also articulate their resilience, strategy, and agency. They speak not only of hardship but of their own survival practices — protecting their children, building community networks, sharing resources, and learning how to navigate institutions that routinely fail them. In Skid Row, these histories and strategies are not hidden or punished but recognized. Women reclaim their narratives by insisting that their presence in Skid Row is not a story of brokenness, but of endurance, community care, and refusal to disappear in the face of systemic neglect.

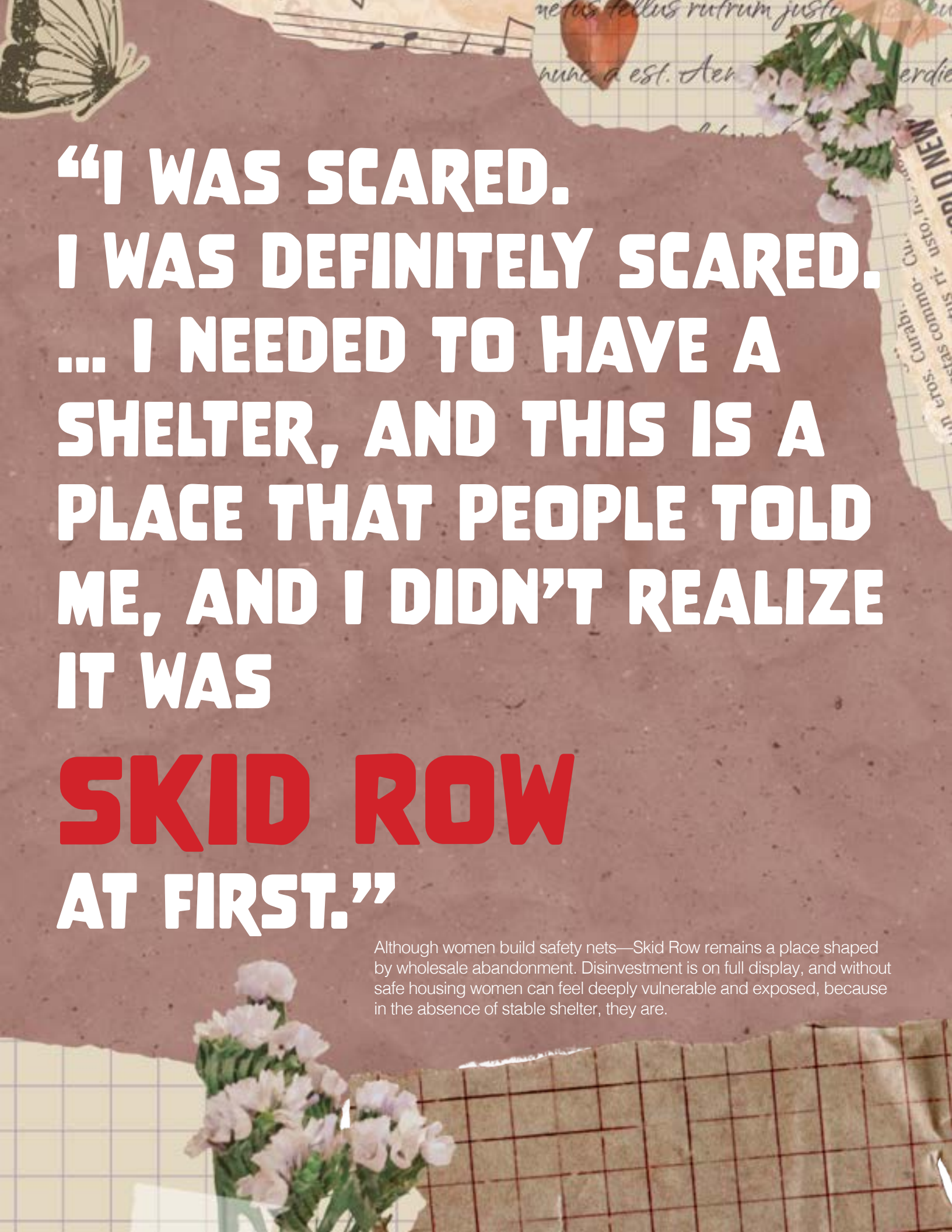
**FOR ME TO- I GOTTA GO.
I LIVE IN LA, I DON'T
THREE DAYS AFTER THAT, I
AND I USUALLY SAY THAT
BECAUSE I WAS LGBT, YOU
THAT WAS KIND OF WHAT I**

**“BUT WHEN WE COME DOWN HERE,
STRANGERS, PEOPLE IN WHEELCHAIRS,
PEOPLE LAYING ON THE GROUND, THEY’RE
TALKING TO MY KIDS, THEY’RE SAYING
“YOU KNOW WHAT, YOU ARE A SMART
GIRL.” STRANGERS, WE DON’T EVEN
KNOW, TALKING TO HER, ENCOURAGING
HIM AND LOVING ON THEM. AND I CAN’T
HELP BUT THINK THEY LOVE THAT, THEY
LOVE THAT. AND EVERYBODY DOES,
EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE ACCEPTED,
RIGHT? FEEL DOWN HERE AND I SAID,**

“WELL, YOU KNOW, I MAYBE THESE PEOPLE ARE MORE HUMBLE TOO BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION THEY’RE IN. THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT THEY’RE IN. THEY’RE LOOKING FOR A FRIEND. THEY’RE LOOKING TO GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT AS WELL AS RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT. THEY’RE LOOKING TO GIVE LOVE JUST AS WELL AS THEY’RE LOOKING TO RECEIVE LOVE. AND SO MAYBE THEY’RE A LITTLE BIT MORE NEEDY DOWN HERE. MAYBE THEY FEEL LIKE THEY NEED US. AND THAT... THAT BRINGS A LOT OF JOY TO MY KIDS”

LEARNING TO LIVE IN SKID ROW





**“I WAS SCARED.
I WAS DEFINITELY SCARED.
... I NEEDED TO HAVE A
SHELTER, AND THIS IS A
PLACE THAT PEOPLE TOLD
ME, AND I DIDN'T REALIZE
IT WAS
SKID ROW
AT FIRST.”**

Although women build safety nets—Skid Row remains a place shaped by wholesale abandonment. Disinvestment is on full display, and without safe housing women can feel deeply vulnerable and exposed, because in the absence of stable shelter, they are.

For those who did not grow up in the area, when asked about their first time in Skid Row, fear and being scared were commonly shared emotions amongst the participants. Beyond the general apprehension of arriving at a new or unfamiliar place, women were fearful about the uncertain conditions of their safety and shelter, and how vulnerable they were to other individuals, harsh weather conditions from living outside, and the persistent presence of law enforcement. Women described being fearful for their personal safety, mothers were fearful for their children's safety, and participants specifically mentioned the lack of security from living in tents and the ability to access housing in the future.

This fear was amplified by the stress of living with the constant noise and chaos of life on the streets, weighing heavily on the physical and mental well-being of Skid Row residents. For many women, Skid Row felt like the opposite of a "laid back type

of place." One participant described how she would always "hear the sirens going off, [...] see the police going that way and then going this way, [...] see the helicopter in the sky, and then there's like all these people everywhere ... it's a lot going on." Rarely, if seldom at all, did women mention any case managers, service providers, or programs in connection to their first impressions or experiences at Skid Row—reflecting the lack of services and resources available for women who find themselves in Skid Row. The constant stress and chaos of living in and navigating the streets of Skid Row never went away for these women. The lack of institutional policies and service programs designed to serve housing-insecure women placed the burden of living and surviving the day-to-day on individuals, and women were driven to establish their own communities and mechanisms to survive.

"I USED TO DO LAUNDRY AT TOP LAUNDROMAT NEAR THE 7/11, SO I WOULD SEE PEOPLE IN PASSING. BUT IT WOULD MAKE ME NERVOUS BECAUSE AT THE TIME MY HAIR [WAS] BLONDE AND BLACK AND BROWN, AND I FELT LIKE MY HAIR WAS VERY FIERY AND VERY NOTICEABLE, AND I DIDN'T LIKE THAT ATTENTION. AND I ALSO HAD PIERCINGS, I'M NOT A NARCISSIST; I WASN'T THE CENTER OF ATTENTION (LAUGHS), BUT IT'S LIKE I STUCK OUT, YOU KNOW. SO I FELT LIKE I HAD TO BE MINDFUL, YOU KNOW. I REALIZED I CAN'T WEAR SHORTS—LIKE IF I WAS, BECAUSE I WAS WORKING OUT AT PLANET FITNESS AND JUST TAKING WALKS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW, I'M IN THE BIG CITY. AND I'M A TELECOMMUTER, SO I'M LEARNING WHERE EVERYTHING IS. BUT YOU KNOW, I EXPERIENCED UNCONSENSUAL SEX, I EXPERIENCED SWEET PEOPLE."



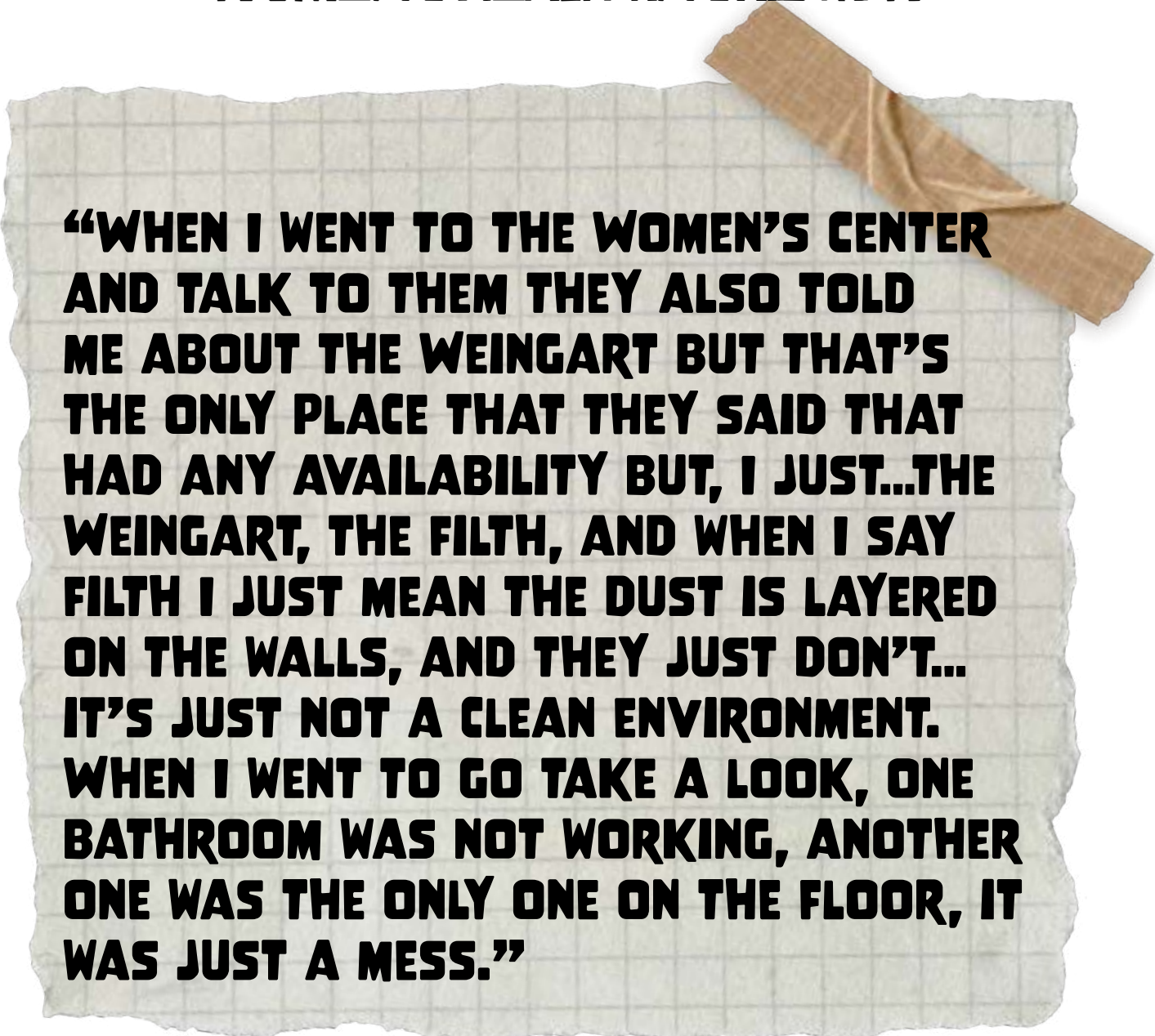
After their initial impressions of and experiences in Skid Row, women described learning to adjust how they carried themselves in everyday life—modifying clothing choices, routines, and social behaviors in response to unwanted attention and to remain inconspicuous in public spaces. The experiences recounted by the participant point to an ongoing, embodied negotiation of visibility, in which the responsibility for safety, security, and comfort is placed on individual women, requiring them to change their daily behaviors and lifestyles in response to gendered experiences, amid the absence of institutional protections that might otherwise support their safety and autonomy. Instead of only being a deficit- or risk-focused account of Skid Row, such tactics emphasized the daily resilience, resourcefulness, and strengths of the women in Skid Row. Similarly, despite only having ever visited Skid Row, the experiences of another participant experiences of navigating Skid Row reflected their determination for survival, while simultaneously recognizing and adapting to the burdens of social isolation.

**“SCARY. BUT I WASN’T
AFRAID. I HAD TO DO
WHAT I HAD TO DO. I
HAD NEVER BEEN IN THIS
ENVIRONMENT. BORN AND
RAISED. NEVER BEEN
TO SKID ROW. COME
DOWNTOWN SHOPPING
ALL THE TIME BUT NEVER**

Over time, women develop complex strategies to survive the conditions of Skid Row and learn how to navigate institutional barriers. What might appear from the outside as disorder or dysfunction often reflects sophisticated survival skills developed under extreme constraint. Survival in Skid Row is not evidence of failure. It is evidence of adaptation within conditions that would destabilize almost anyone.

**INTO IT. AND BACK IN THE
DAY, IT'S NOT LIKE THIS.
FIGUEROA AND ALL THAT
WAS HILL STREET AND
HOPE STREET. IT WASN'T
URBAN CAMPING. SO,
BUT... IT'S KIND OF LEERY,
BUT I HAD TO DO WHAT I
HAVE TO DO. I-STAY
TO MYSELF."**

ORGANIZED ABANDONMENT, UNMET NEEDS, AND WOMEN'S HEALTH IN SKID ROW



“WHEN I WENT TO THE WOMEN’S CENTER AND TALK TO THEM THEY ALSO TOLD ME ABOUT THE WEINGART BUT THAT’S THE ONLY PLACE THAT THEY SAID THAT HAD ANY AVAILABILITY BUT, I JUST...THE WEINGART, THE FILTH, AND WHEN I SAY FILTH I JUST MEAN THE DUST IS LAYERED ON THE WALLS, AND THEY JUST DON’T... IT’S JUST NOT A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT. WHEN I WENT TO GO TAKE A LOOK, ONE BATHROOM WAS NOT WORKING, ANOTHER ONE WAS THE ONLY ONE ON THE FLOOR, IT WAS JUST A MESS.”

Women describe their journey as a cumulative form of exclusion and abandonment, an experience of events that accumulate and intensify during their time in Skid Row. These shared experiences are characterized by invisibilization, surveillance, and acts of omission, shaped by interactions that can be seen as transactional within the institution and among individuals. Being hyper-invisibilized is congruent with the concept of organized abandonment, meaning the Los Angeles city, county, and California state officials have chosen not to substantially invest in the Skid Row community (Gilmore, 2007).

This lack of investment inherently allows the decades-old infrastructure within Skid Row to continue to deteriorate. Infrastructure meant to support women's access to clean water, nutritious food, and physical and mental health services is non-existent. Without these investments, women are forced to engage in survival strategies to obtain the basic necessities for living, often falling short of the direly needed access to basic needs like nutritious food and water that ultimately exacerbates mental and physical health conditions.

ALMOST TWO OUT OF EVERY THREE WOMEN (64%) REPORTED WORRYING THAT THEY WOULD NOT HAVE ENOUGH FOOD.



MORE THAN SIX IN TEN WOMEN (62%) REPORTED THAT THEY OR THEIR FAMILY RAN OUT OF FOOD ENTIRELY, AND NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS (72%) EXPERIENCED HUNGER BUT DID NOT EAT.



SYSTEMIC HEALTH NEGLECT

Women living in Skid Row face significant structural barriers that impede access to basic human necessities such as food, water, and hygiene essentials. Women in Skid Row are unable to meet basic human needs, such as access to food and water. Almost two out of every three women (64%) reported worrying that they would not have enough food. 62% of the women cited that, due to a lack of money or other resources, they are unable to access healthy, nutritious food. Hunger has become the norm, pervasively acknowledged but not openly discussed. Food deprivation is a daily struggle that 71% reported eating only a few kinds of food over the last 12 months, 68% had to skip meals, and 66% ate less than they felt they should. More than six in ten women (62%) reported that they or their family ran out of food entirely, and nearly three-quarters (72%) experienced hunger but did not eat. In addition, access to water further highlights how basic resources in Skid Row are inadequate.

While 45% are not worried about having access to clean water, more than half of the respondents (55%) expressed concerns and uncertainty about having access to clean water in the past year. These conditions of infrastructural instability and unmet public health needs account for hyperinvisibility, as the scarcity of basic resources demonstrates incessant food insecurity, and the lack of nutrition is a prevalent issue that further renders invisibility in everyday life in Skid Row. The survey data demonstrate that invisibility transforms into hyperinvisibility, not because no one notices the scarcity of resources, but deprivation becomes normalized. Institutional support fails to treat it as an urgent crisis that requires long-term structural solutions that necessitate continuous and stable intervention.

BARRIERS TO CARE AND POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES

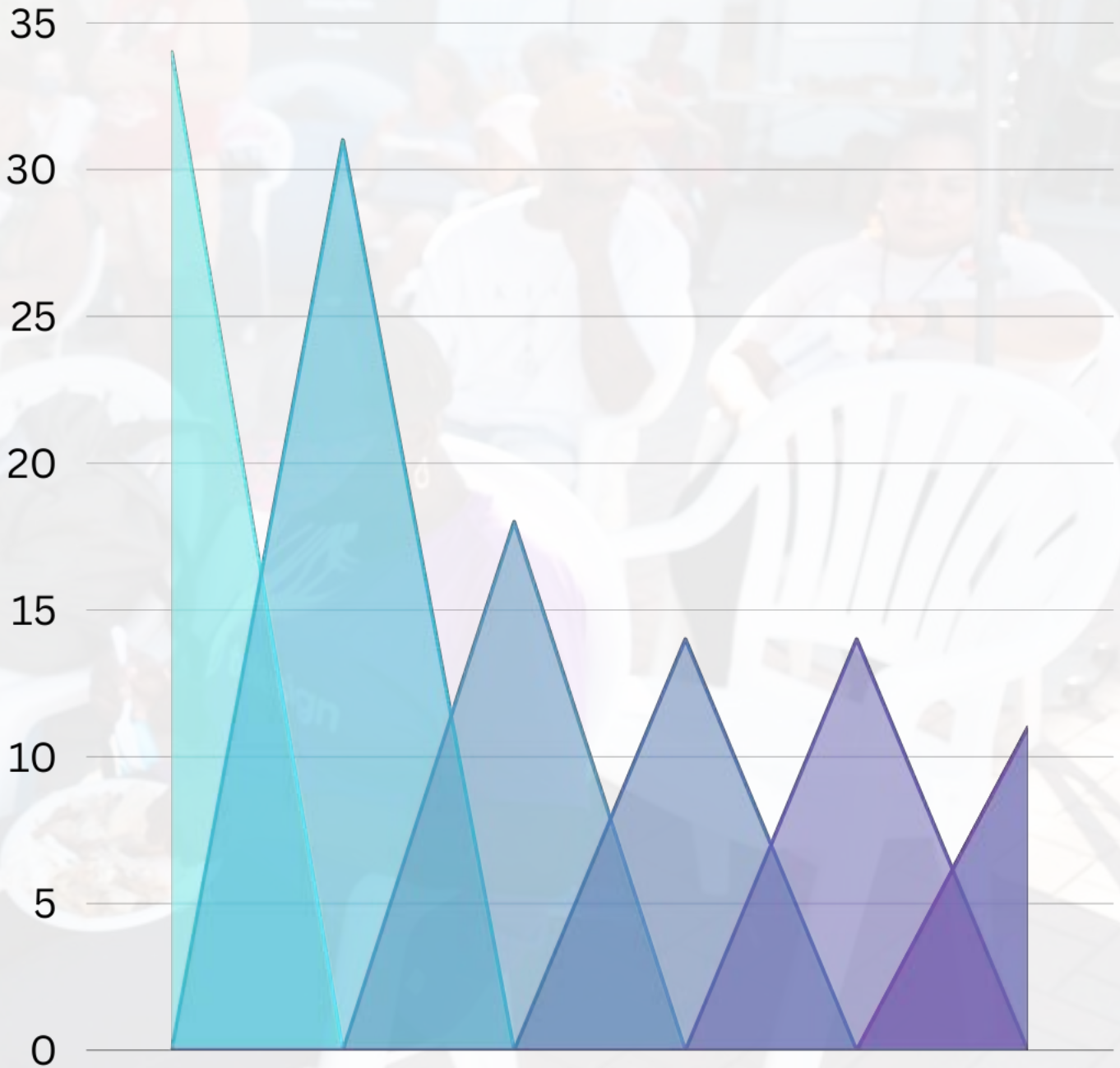
The survey data reflect that the health crises women in Skid Row experience are layered and cumulative. Chronic illness, disability, aging, and prolonged housing instability interact over time, deepening vulnerability while limiting access to care. Women in Skid Row consistently self-report that there are high incidents of chronic disease, health and mental health challenges, and disabling conditions, reflecting the compounded impacts of poverty, medical racism, and structured ableism. Of the 143 women who completed the survey, 55% of women described their health as fair to poor. When asked whether women were asked if a doctor or health care provider ever told them if they had a chronic condition, and women self-reported the following: prevalence of chronic conditions such as asthma (34%), high blood pressure (31%), diabetes (18%), heart disease (14%), high cholesterol (16%), and cancer (11%).

Of the 55% of women who self-reported poor to fair health, 45% of those women are 50 years of age and older. Nearly half (49%) identified as Black community and 27% from the Latine community. Ultimately, meaning a substantial portion of women living in poor to fair health are older Black women. The hyperinvisibility of women experiencing these conditions is also evident in the survey results. Of these women experiencing poor health, 42% often felt isolated from others, and 36% stated that they had no one to support them. Of this subpopulation, 74% also identified as being disabled or having a chronic health condition. This disability also resulted in 62% of women being unable to fully participate in work, school, housework, and other activities. This pattern reflects broader national trends. Nearly half of people experiencing homelessness live with some form of disability—approximately 2.5 times the rate of the general U.S. population (19.8%) (Henry et al., 2022). Lastly, of all women who reported poor to fair health 47% of these women were currently houseless, with 60% experiencing houselessness for three or more years. For many women in Skid Row, disability is not only a health status but also a reflection of structural barriers and systemic neglect. In this context, homelessness itself becomes both a cause and consequence of disability.

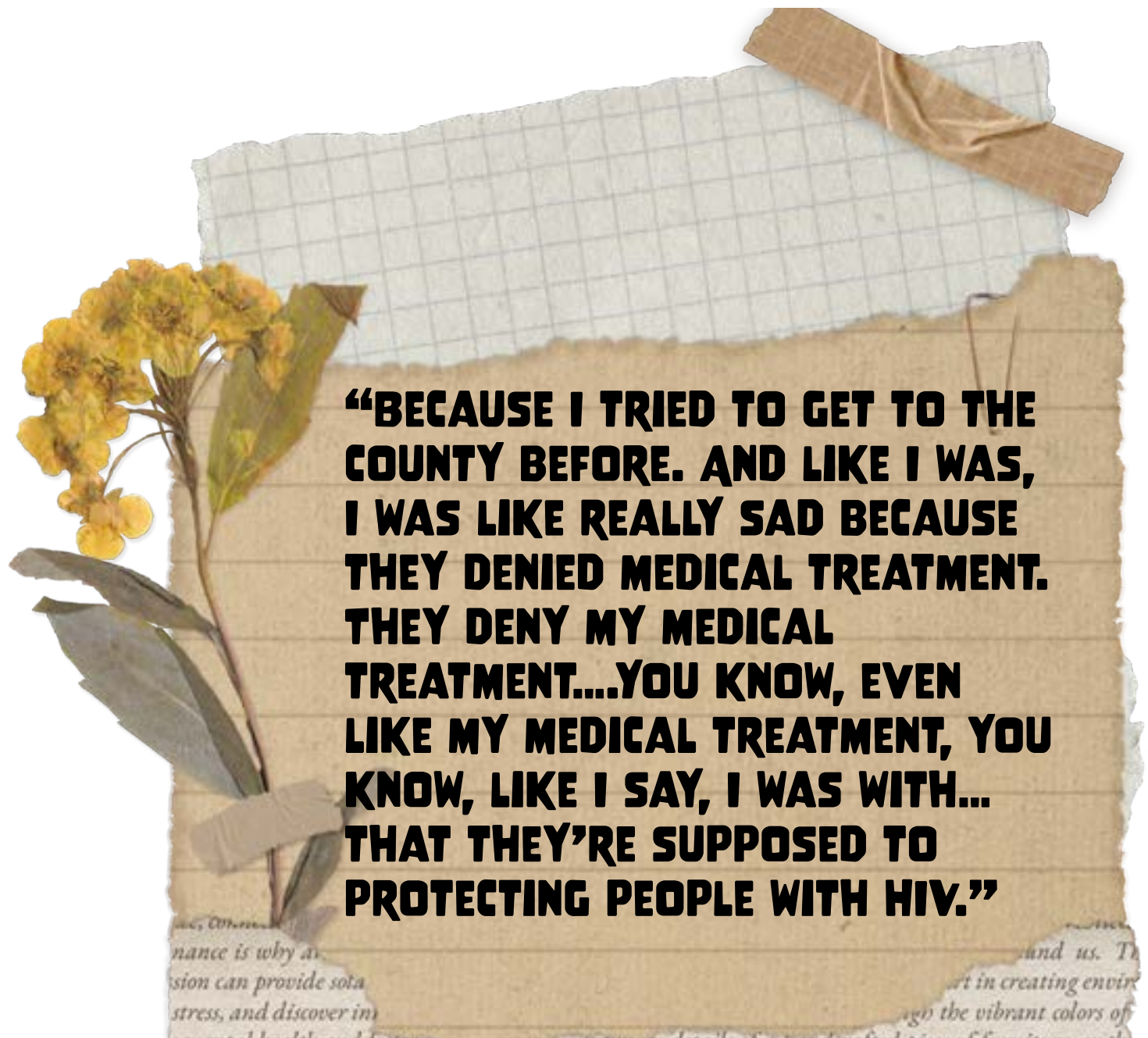


PREVALENCE OF CHRONIC CONDITIONS

- Asthma 34%
- High Blood Pressure 31%
- Diabetes 18%
- Heart Disease 14%
- High Cholesterol 14%
- Cancer 11%



NEARLY HALF OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS LIVE WITH SOME FORM OF DISABILITY—APPROXIMATELY 2.5 TIMES THE RATE OF THE GENERAL U.S. POPULATION (19.8%)

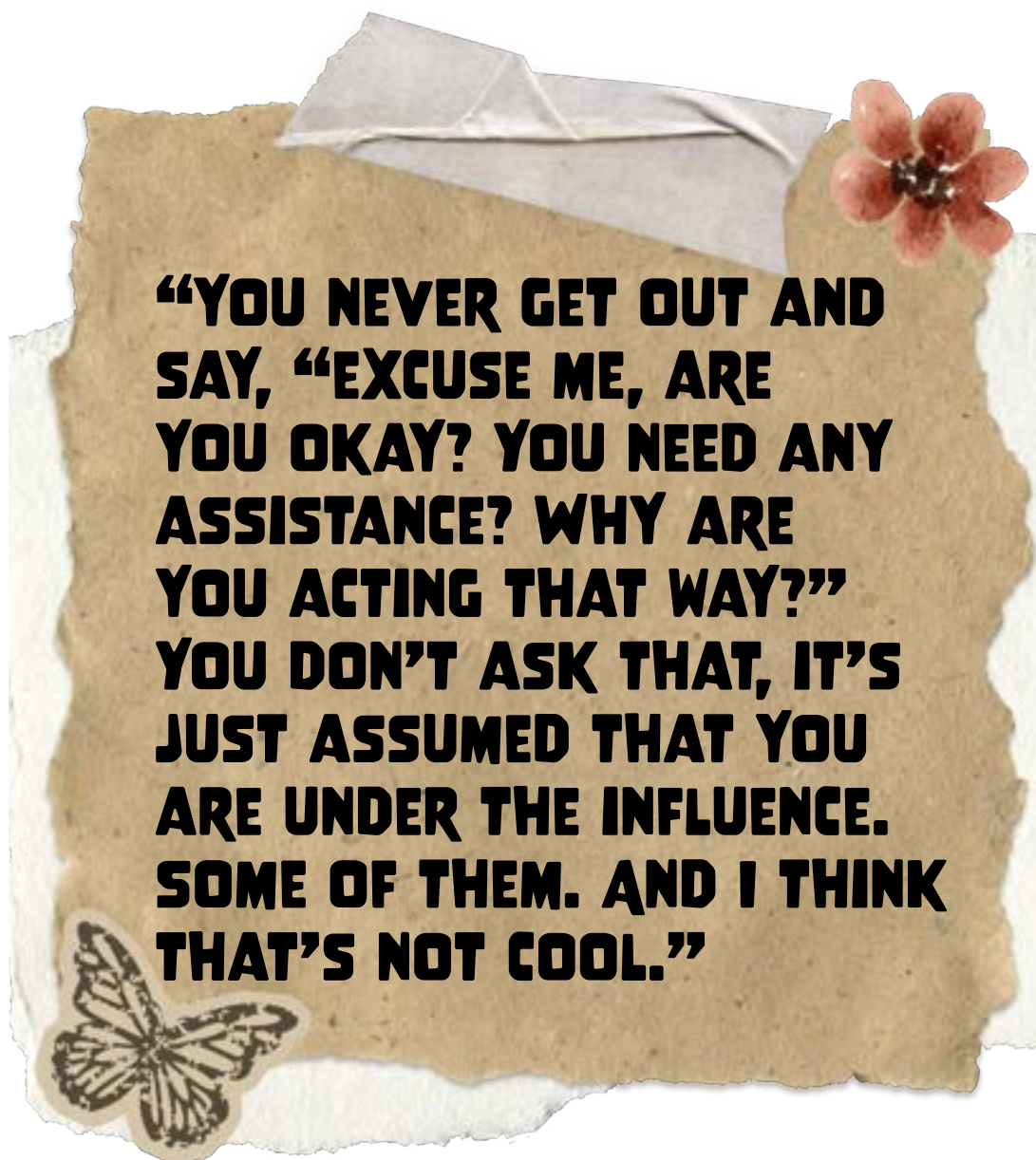


The survey data reflect that the health crises that women in Skid Row experience are compounded. They are dealing with serious health issues that pile up and further worsen over time. It illustrates the tensions between invisibility and visibility through surveillance. Hyperinvisibilization is reinforced because while illness in Skid Row is widespread and clearly visible, it fails to generate immediate attention without a sustained institutional response, especially for marginalized groups like older Black women, who are often ignored. This woman explains how she was being denied access to treatment for HIV.

Such experiences highlight how ableism within healthcare systems can restrict access to life-saving

treatment, especially for those who are poor, disabled, and unhoused. Social isolation and unmet basic needs and disability accommodations further extend invisibility, as suffering occurs outside formal systems of care. Meanwhile, women in Skid Row become visible through surveillance due to perceived risk. It transforms to hypersurveillance when involuntary psychiatric holds are prevalent, which are frequently met with negative assumptions, dismissal, and neglect.

Women with Disabilities and mental health conditions are often subjected to intense scrutiny to determine eligibility for services and regulate individuals' behavior. However, this focus often comes at the

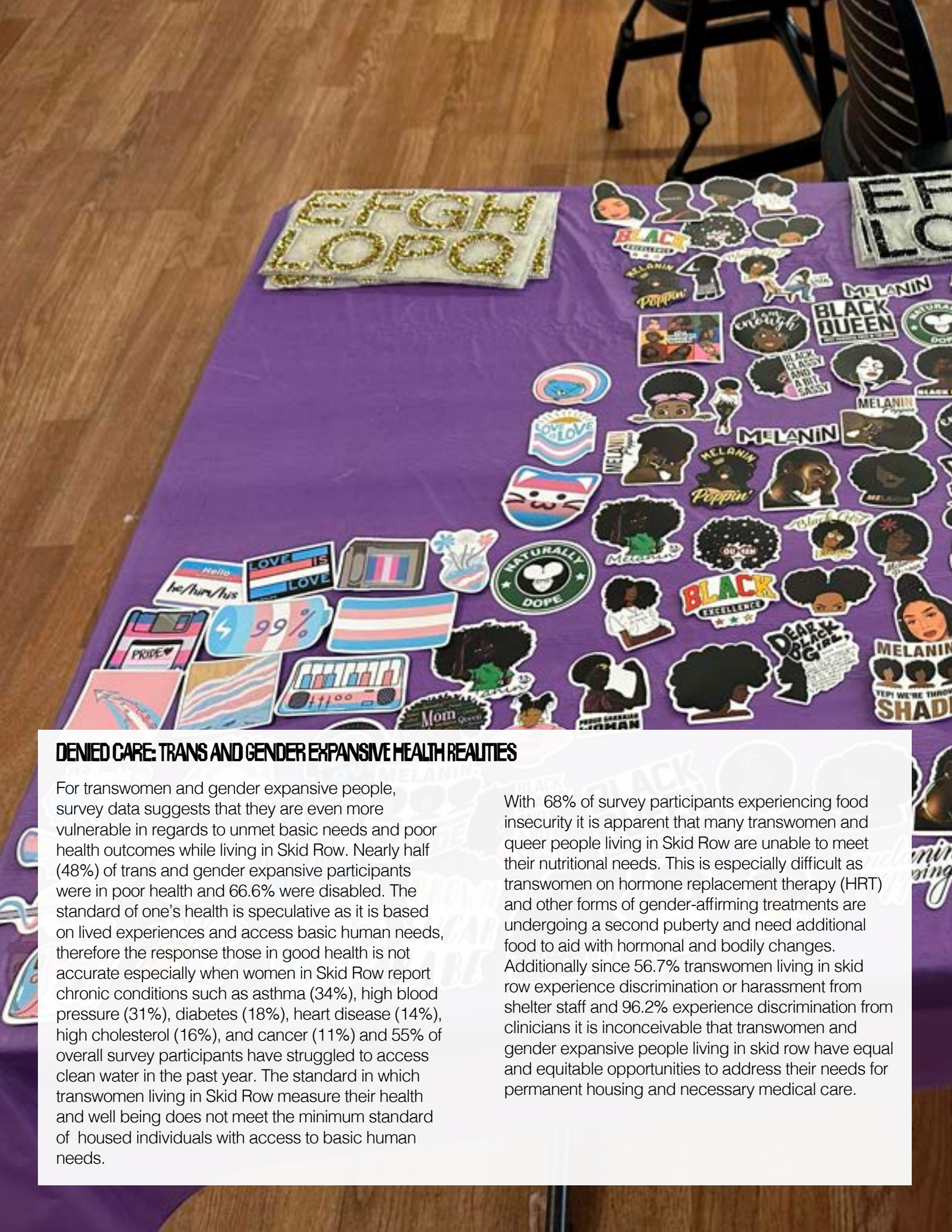


expense of addressing women's everyday health needs.

In 2024, California voters approved Proposition 1, expanding bond funding for behavioral health beds and supportive housing while restructuring state mental health funds (Associated Press, 2024). The measure deepens a policy trend that ties homelessness to psychiatric infrastructure. Women in Skid Row warn that framing street homelessness primarily as untreated mental illness obscures its economic and gendered drivers. Behavioral health expansion in this context, risks strengthening systems of containment.

Women's healthcare requires them to be physically present and compliant to access short-term services

that are mostly in outreach settings, mobile and community health clinics, where women are closely monitored but only receive temporary help, and hospital-based care is rare. As a result, they remain highly visible for surveillance, yet remain excluded from consistent, ongoing care. This supports the assumption that the reluctance of unhoused participants to help themselves, often seen as 'service non-compliance,' is simplistic and unfairly shifts the burden that goes beyond their control (Martino, Dej & Sanders, 2025). It illustrates a system that constrains and forces women to constant supervision without genuine care and support.



DENIED CARE: TRANS AND GENDER EXPANSIVE HEALTH REALITIES

For transwomen and gender expansive people, survey data suggests that they are even more vulnerable in regards to unmet basic needs and poor health outcomes while living in Skid Row. Nearly half (48%) of trans and gender expansive participants were in poor health and 66.6% were disabled. The standard of one's health is speculative as it is based on lived experiences and access basic human needs, therefore the response those in good health is not accurate especially when women in Skid Row report chronic conditions such as asthma (34%), high blood pressure (31%), diabetes (18%), heart disease (14%), high cholesterol (16%), and cancer (11%) and 55% of overall survey participants have struggled to access clean water in the past year. The standard in which transwomen living in Skid Row measure their health and well being does not meet the minimum standard of housed individuals with access to basic human needs.

With 68% of survey participants experiencing food insecurity it is apparent that many transwomen and queer people living in Skid Row are unable to meet their nutritional needs. This is especially difficult as transwomen on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and other forms of gender-affirming treatments are undergoing a second puberty and need additional food to aid with hormonal and bodily changes. Additionally since 56.7% transwomen living in skid row experience discrimination or harassment from shelter staff and 96.2% experience discrimination from clinicians it is inconceivable that transwomen and gender expansive people living in skid row have equal and equitable opportunities to address their needs for permanent housing and necessary medical care.

56.7% TRANSWOMEN LIVING IN SKID ROW EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION OR HARASSMENT FROM SHELTER STAFF

96.2% EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION FROM CLINICIANS

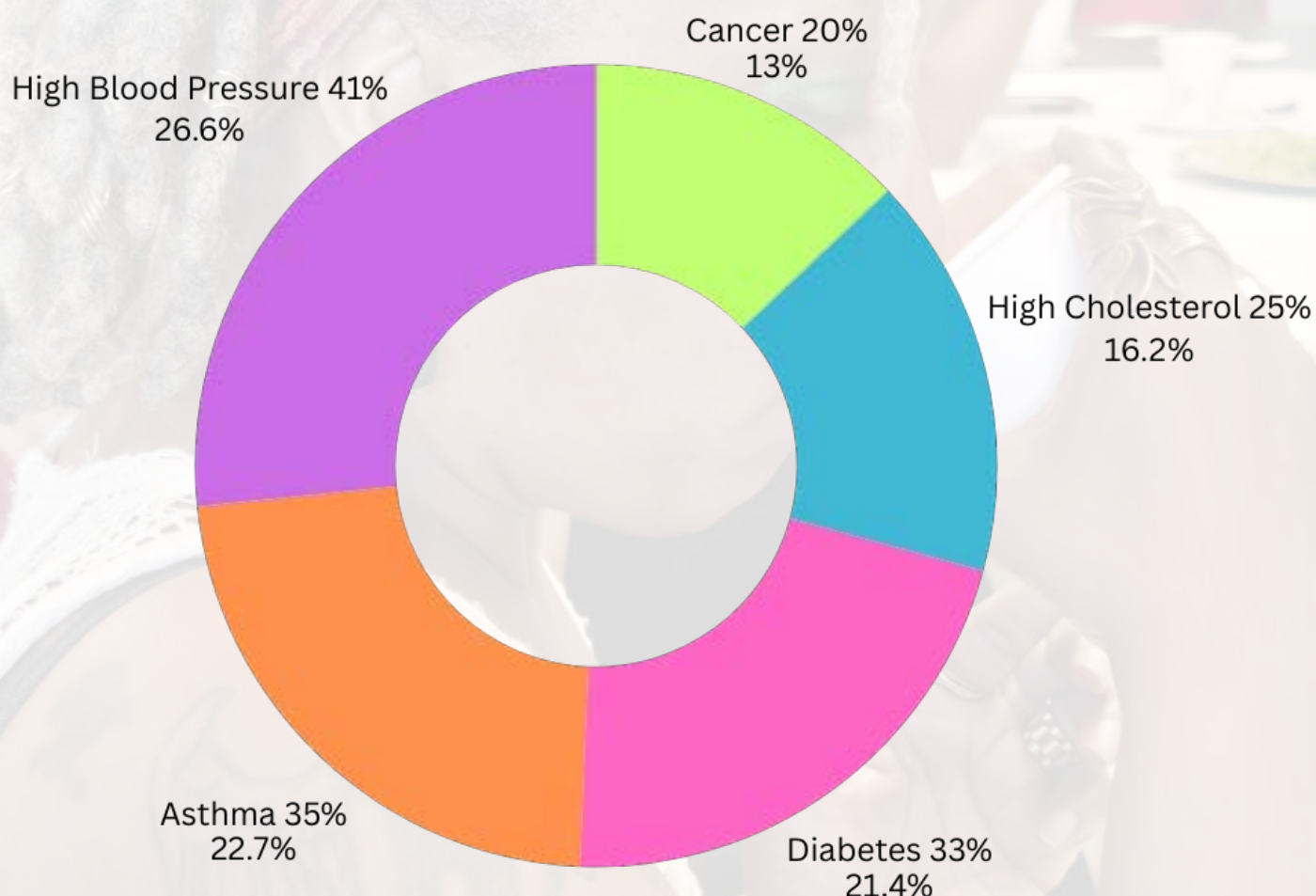
NEARLY HALF (48%) OF TRANS AND GENDER EXPANSIVE PARTICIPANTS WERE IN POOR HEALTH AND 66.6% WERE DISABLED.

55% OF OVERALL SURVEY PARTICIPANTS HAVE STRUGGLED TO ACCESS CLEAN WATER IN THE PAST YEAR.

AGING WITHOUT CARE: HEALTH REALITIES FOR OLDER WOMEN / OR / SOCIETAL ELDER ABUSE AND WOMEN IN SKID ROW

Older women in Skid Row face unique challenges with many experiencing multiple health burdens and disabilities. 71% of older women surveyed reported that they had a disability. 63% self reported that they had poor or fair health. Furthermore, many of these women reported that a health professional had previously told them that they had: high blood pressure (41%), asthma (35%), diabetes (33%), high cholesterol (25%), and cancer (20%). Health conditions, the daily experiences of pain or discomfort these can cause, and unstable access to medication contribute to coping strategies related to substance use, relying on over the counter medications to “self-medicate.” For example, in our focus groups with older women, when older women were asked how they coped with health issues, they stated: **“VICODIN- GETTING HIGH THAT’S SELF MEDICATION- THEY WON’T GIVE YOU ... UNLESS YOU HAVE IDENTIFICATION BUT THEY STOLE THAT ... CAN’T GET ANYTHING THAT’S WHERE IT IS AT THE MOMENT.”**

WOMEN REPORTED THAT A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD THEM THAT THEY HAD:



The challenge of accessing proper care and maintaining medications is further compounded when faced with housing insecurity. Frequent tent sweeps and theft among older women living on the streets contribute to a frustrating and exhausting cycle: women's belongings are stolen and they must recuperate medication that is critical to treating health issues.

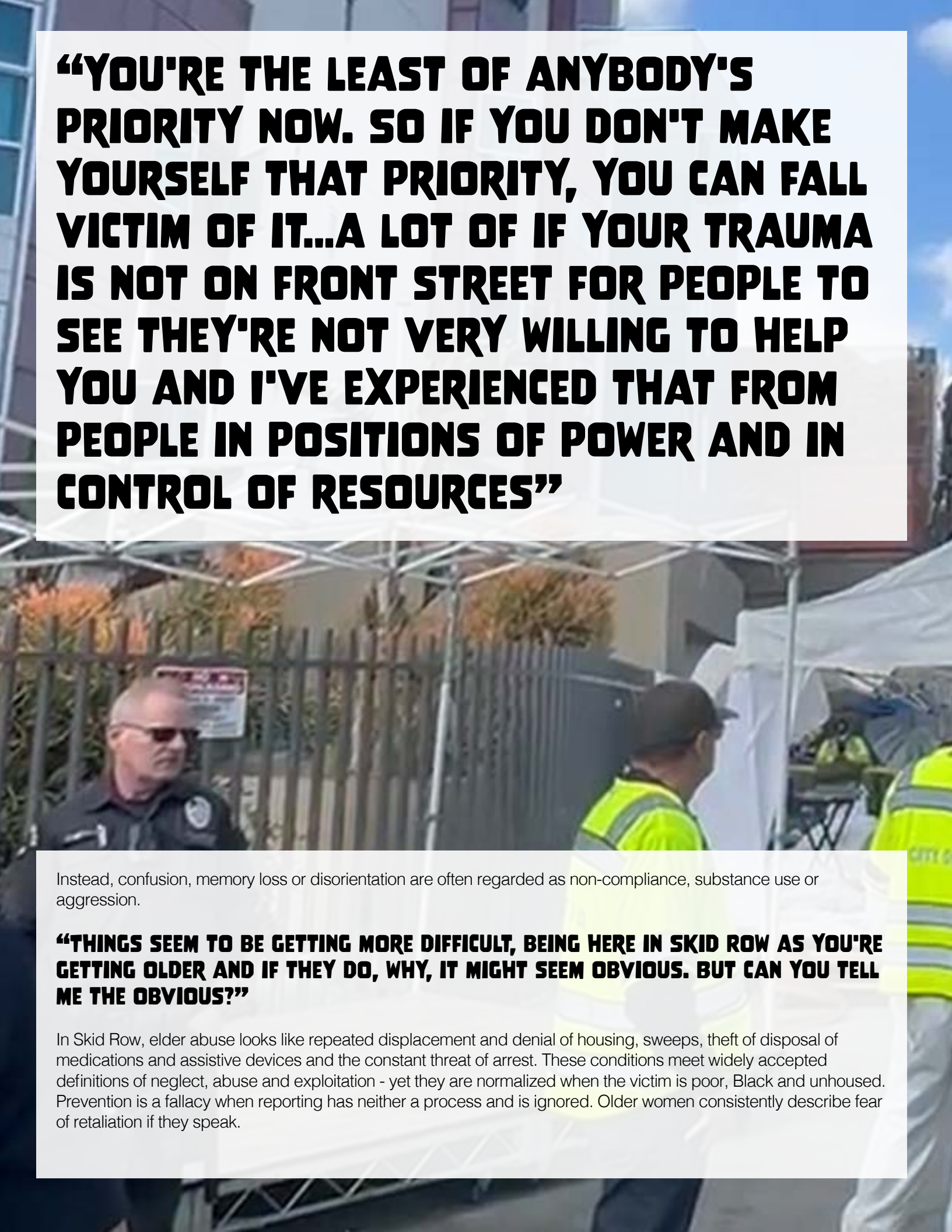
**“MY LIVING SITUATION, IT IS
WHAT IT IS, I’M TIRED OF THE
CITY TAKING MY STUFF ALL THE
TIME. MY CLOTHES, EVERYTHING,
MY MEDICATION, EVERYTHING,
EVERYTHING. EVERY TWO WEEKS,
EVERY OTHER WEEK MY STUFF IS
BEING TAKEN...IF ITS NOT THE CITY
THEN ITS OTHER PEOPLE AROUND
ME. I’M SO TIRED OF HAVING TO
REPLACE THING AFTER THING AFTER
THING AFTER THING.”**

While elder abuse is often framed as an interpersonal problem, caused by family members or caregivers’ neglect, older women in Skid Row face societal elder abuse through what the state fails to prevent. This is produced through chronic neglect, criminalization, medical dismissal and wholesale abandonment - the systemic withdrawal of care paired with the expansion of punitive governance (Wilson Gilmore). Older women in Skid Row live with conditions that simultaneously position them as invisible and hyper-controlled. They are expected to survive prolonged homelessness, declining health and cognitive changes with minimal support while being subjected to policing and displacement.

“SKID ROW IS NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN. RIGHT? OKAY, IT'S VERY. IT'S IT'S HARD. BUT YEAH IT'S NOT THAT. IT'S NOT ABOUT THE PLACE. IT'S ABOUT THE SITUATION. IT'S ABOUT SITUATION THAT YOU HAVE TO BE CONSTANTLY WORKING TO SURVIVE... YOU HAVE TO, YOU KNOW, CONSTANTLY THINKING, WHAT? HOW AM I GOING TO GET THROUGH THIS? HOW AM I GOING TO GET ON THIS LIST? HOW AM I GOING TO GET THIS DONE SO I CAN AT LEAST GET SOME STABLE HOUSING. IT'S A CONSTANT THING AND IT'S A SITUATION THAT YOU'RE IN THAT YOU DON'T KNOW. YOU DON'T SEE YOU DON'T SEE NO LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL. YOU KNOW THAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS BECAUSE

Women in Skid Row are aging on the streets under extreme stress. The onset of poor health is a leading risk factor for homelessness among older women and is often exacerbated by the conditions associated with being unhoused (Urban Institute, 2025). Exposure to the chronic stress, violence, and trauma of being unhoused takes a physical and psychological toll, including the acceleration of cognitive decline among aging women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Ra et al., 2021; Khor, 2024). Yet untreated mental health conditions and cognitive impairment are rarely identified or supported in humane ways.

HOUSING IS A PROBLEM IN EVERYBODY, AND THE GROWING NUMBER OF WOMEN BECOMING HOMELESS IN THIS SITUATION IS HIGHER THAN ANY OTHER GROUPS AND WOMEN WITH CHILDREN...AND IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT YOU'RE HERE AND BUT PEOPLE TREAT YOU LIKE, OKAY, YOU ON SKID ROW, WHAT YOU DO, HOW YOU MESS UP SO BAD. AND THAT'S NOT WHAT IT IS. A PLACE WHERE TOXIC INEQUALITY IS THIS THIS ECONOMY THAT WE'RE LIVING NOW IN THE UNITED STATES IS CREATING US AND IT'S NOT GIVING US A CHOICE. WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE IN THIS THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE TO TRY TO SURVIVE. WE HAVE TO WORK EVERY DAY IN SKID ROW TO TRY TO SURVIVE.”



“YOU'RE THE LEAST OF ANYBODY'S PRIORITY NOW. SO IF YOU DON'T MAKE YOURSELF THAT PRIORITY, YOU CAN FALL VICTIM OF IT...A LOT OF IF YOUR TRAUMA IS NOT ON FRONT STREET FOR PEOPLE TO SEE THEY'RE NOT VERY WILLING TO HELP YOU AND I'VE EXPERIENCED THAT FROM PEOPLE IN POSITIONS OF POWER AND IN CONTROL OF RESOURCES”

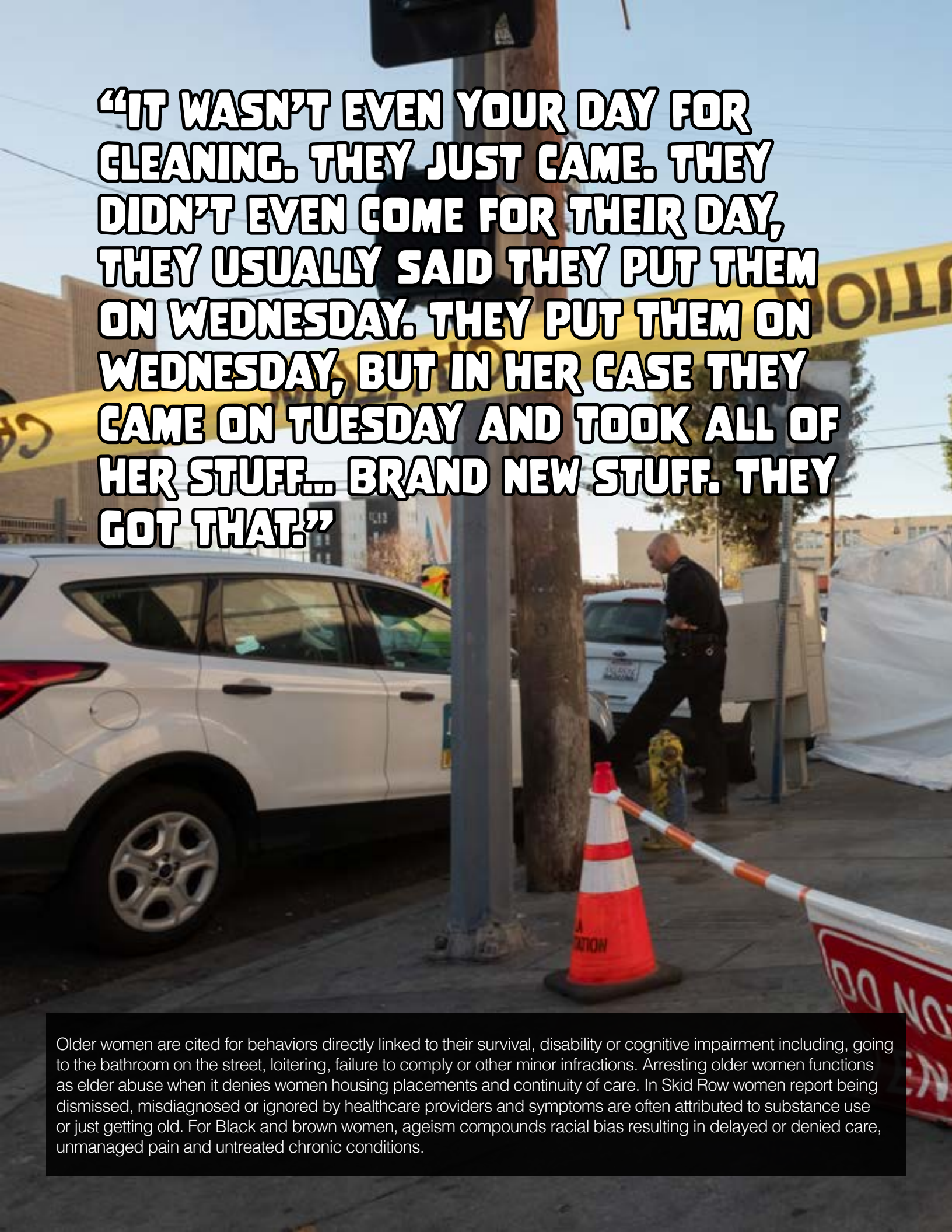
Instead, confusion, memory loss or disorientation are often regarded as non-compliance, substance use or aggression.

“THINGS SEEM TO BE GETTING MORE DIFFICULT, BEING HERE IN SKID ROW AS YOU'RE GETTING OLDER AND IF THEY DO, WHY, IT MIGHT SEEM OBVIOUS. BUT CAN YOU TELL ME THE OBVIOUS?”

In Skid Row, elder abuse looks like repeated displacement and denial of housing, sweeps, theft or disposal of medications and assistive devices and the constant threat of arrest. These conditions meet widely accepted definitions of neglect, abuse and exploitation - yet they are normalized when the victim is poor, Black and unhoused. Prevention is a fallacy when reporting has neither a process and is ignored. Older women consistently describe fear of retaliation if they speak.

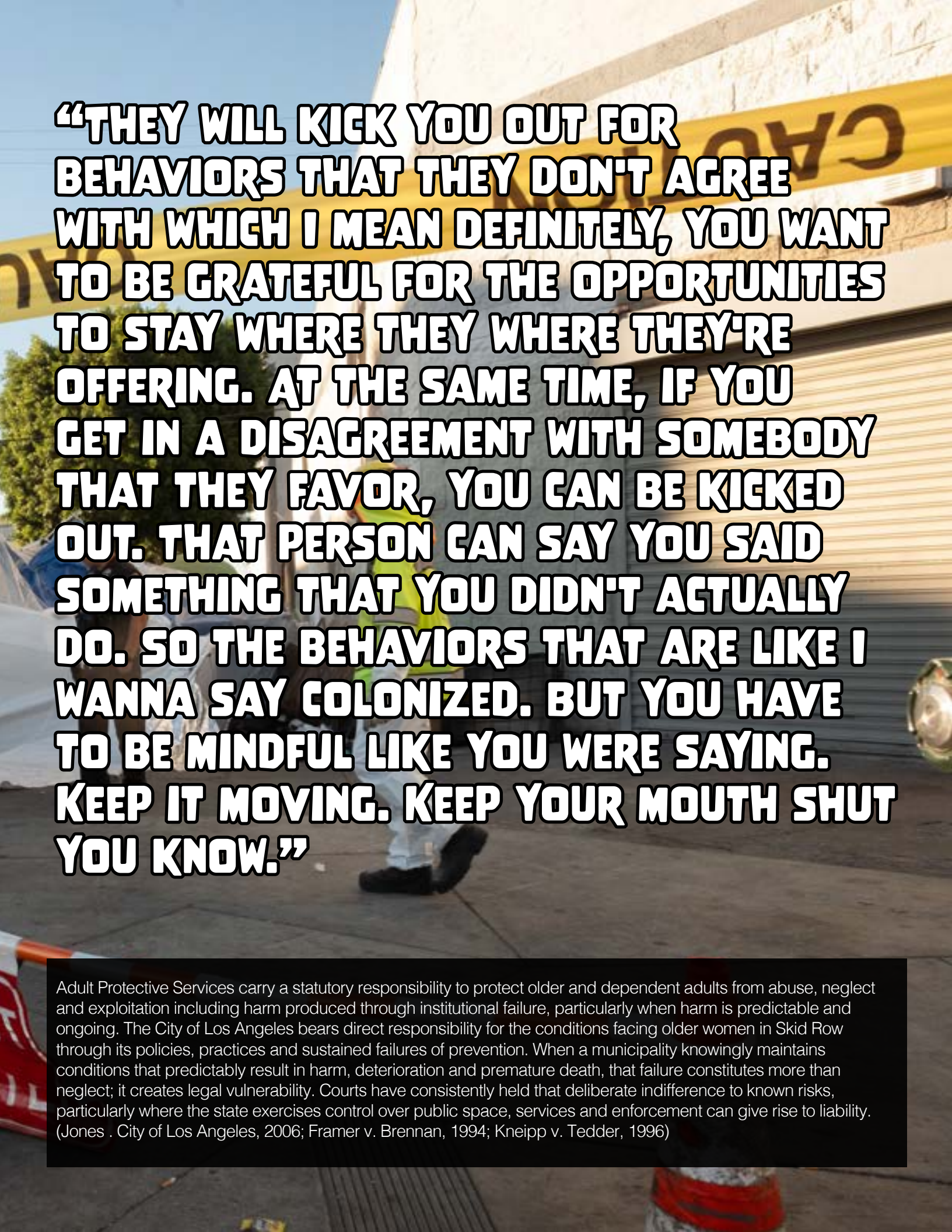
"I HATE THE SANITATION DEPARTMENT... WHAT THEY [UNHOUSED PERSON] HAVE IS ALL THEY HAVE, AND WHEN IT'S STREET CLEANING...THEY TAKE YOUR WHOLE TENT BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T PUT IT BEHIND THE LINE LIKE YOU COULD HAVE MOVED IT.. THE POLICE HAVE COME OVER AND LET THEM JUST TAKE ALL OF THEIR STUFF AND DUMP IT IN THE DUMP TRUCK. I THINK THAT IS JUST SO RUDE...LIKE THEY HAVE NO FEELINGS FOR IT...WHEN THEY COME AND JUST DUMP YOUR WHOLE STUFF IN THE TRASH, THAT'S WHAT 'S HARMFUL. I CANNOT STAND THEM MORE THAN THE POLICE. THE POLICE WELL, THERE ARE SOME GOOD ONES AND SOME BAD ONES BUT SANITATION ALL OF THEM ARE A-HOLES, YEAH."



A photograph of a street scene. In the foreground, a white SUV is parked on the left. A police officer in a dark uniform is standing in the middle ground, looking down at something in his hands. Yellow crime scene tape is strung across the background. A red and white traffic cone is in the foreground on the right. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

“IT WASN’T EVEN YOUR DAY FOR CLEANING. THEY JUST CAME. THEY DIDN’T EVEN COME FOR THEIR DAY, THEY USUALLY SAID THEY PUT THEM ON WEDNESDAY. THEY PUT THEM ON WEDNESDAY, BUT IN HER CASE THEY CAME ON TUESDAY AND TOOK ALL OF HER STUFF... BRAND NEW STUFF. THEY GOT THAT.”

Older women are cited for behaviors directly linked to their survival, disability or cognitive impairment including, going to the bathroom on the street, loitering, failure to comply or other minor infractions. Arresting older women functions as elder abuse when it denies women housing placements and continuity of care. In Skid Row women report being dismissed, misdiagnosed or ignored by healthcare providers and symptoms are often attributed to substance use or just getting old. For Black and brown women, ageism compounds racial bias resulting in delayed or denied care, unmanaged pain and untreated chronic conditions.



“THEY WILL KICK YOU OUT FOR BEHAVIORS THAT THEY DON'T AGREE WITH WHICH I MEAN DEFINITELY, YOU WANT TO BE GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES TO STAY WHERE THEY WHERE THEY'RE OFFERING. AT THE SAME TIME, IF YOU GET IN A DISAGREEMENT WITH SOMEBODY THAT THEY FAVOR, YOU CAN BE KICKED OUT. THAT PERSON CAN SAY YOU SAID SOMETHING THAT YOU DIDN'T ACTUALLY DO. SO THE BEHAVIORS THAT ARE LIKE I WANNA SAY COLONIZED. BUT YOU HAVE TO BE MINDFUL LIKE YOU WERE SAYING. KEEP IT MOVING. KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT YOU KNOW.”

Adult Protective Services carry a statutory responsibility to protect older and dependent adults from abuse, neglect and exploitation including harm produced through institutional failure, particularly when harm is predictable and ongoing. The City of Los Angeles bears direct responsibility for the conditions facing older women in Skid Row through its policies, practices and sustained failures of prevention. When a municipality knowingly maintains conditions that predictably result in harm, deterioration and premature death, that failure constitutes more than neglect; it creates legal vulnerability. Courts have consistently held that deliberate indifference to known risks, particularly where the state exercises control over public space, services and enforcement can give rise to liability. (Jones . City of Los Angeles, 2006; Framer v. Brennan, 1994; Kneipp v. Tedder, 1996)

Despite great challenges for older women living on the streets, accessing shelter housing, let alone stable housing is a frustrating process:

“YOU CAN GET A PLATE. YOU CAN GET A SHOWER. BUT AS FAR AS GETTING HOUSING EXCLUSIVELY, IT’S GONNA TAKE LONGER THAN AND EVEN IN SHELTERS YOU HAVE TO WAIT ALL DAY. AND THEN THEY SAY, OH, WELL.... TO GET A SHELTER... YOU HAVE TO GO. SIT, WAIT TO BE CALLED, AND THEN THEY DON’T CALL YOU. I KNOW IT’S OLDER, LADY. SHE’S LIKE 70. IT TOOK HER LIKE 3 MONTHS JUST TO GET SHELTER BED. THAT’S LIKE RIDICULOUS.”

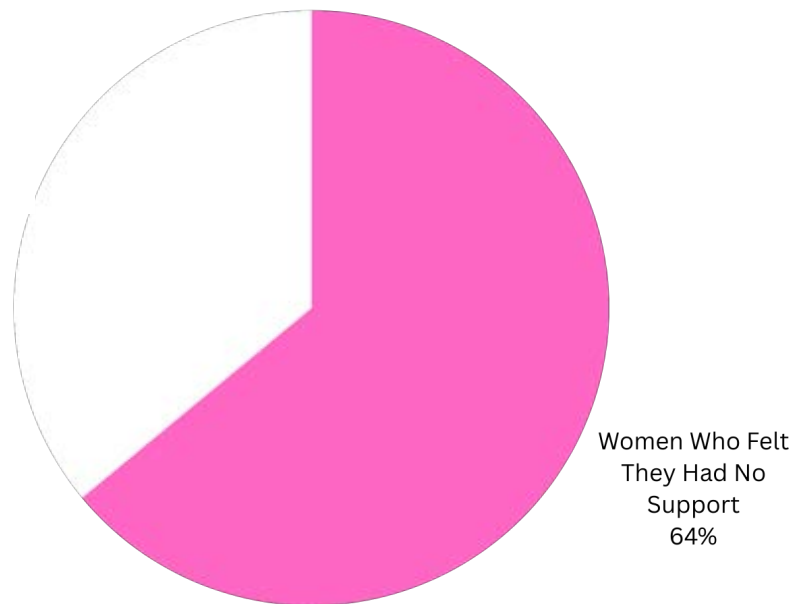
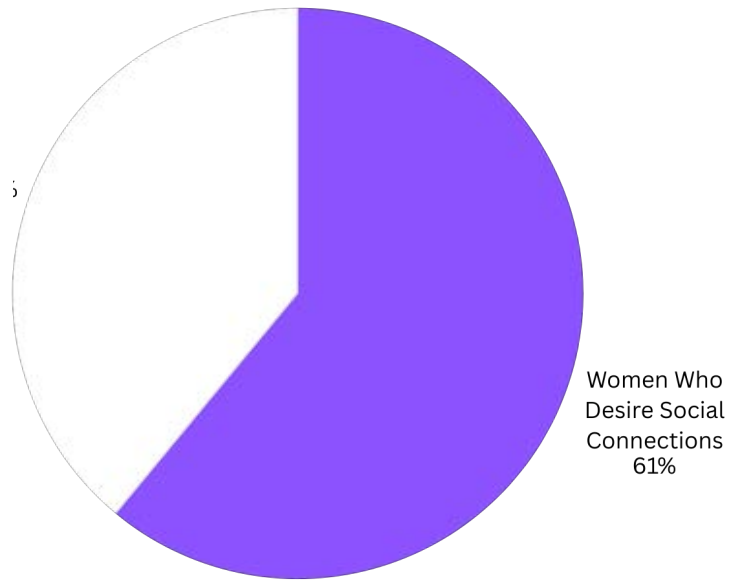
**“THE MIDNIGHT
MISSION. THEY MADE
THEIR WOMEN SLEEP
IN THE COURTYARD
OUTSIDE AND THEN
THEY KICK THEM OUT AT
4:30 IN THE MORNING.
WHY WOULD YOU DO
THAT? THAT’S NOT EVEN
SAFE. YEAH, IT’S STILL
DARK OUTSIDE AT 4:30,
AND NOT THAT IT’S
ALREADY NOT CREEPY...
IT’S REALLY CREEPY AT
4:30”**

Upon seeking housing, organizations often have specific requirements and the individuals working there are subject to their own biases about who should get housing, contributing to discrimination based on who is perceived as “deserving.”

As one focus group participant stated:

**“THEY WANT A CERTAIN
PROFILE PERSON, PROFILE
TO COME IN THERE, YOU
KNOW...HAVE A WALKER.
OH, YEAH, I EXPERIENCED
ALL THAT I WAS APPLYING
FOR SENIOR CITIZEN
PLACES ALL OVER THE
PLACE...THEY WANT**

**CERTAIN PROFILE PEOPLE
IN THERE, AND YOU
COULD TELL YOU, SENIOR
CITIZENS... (INAUDIBLE)
WE MAY NOT LOOK LIKE
SENIOR BUT WE ARE
SENIORS... A LOT OF HATE
GOING ON..."**



SOCIAL ISOLATION AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

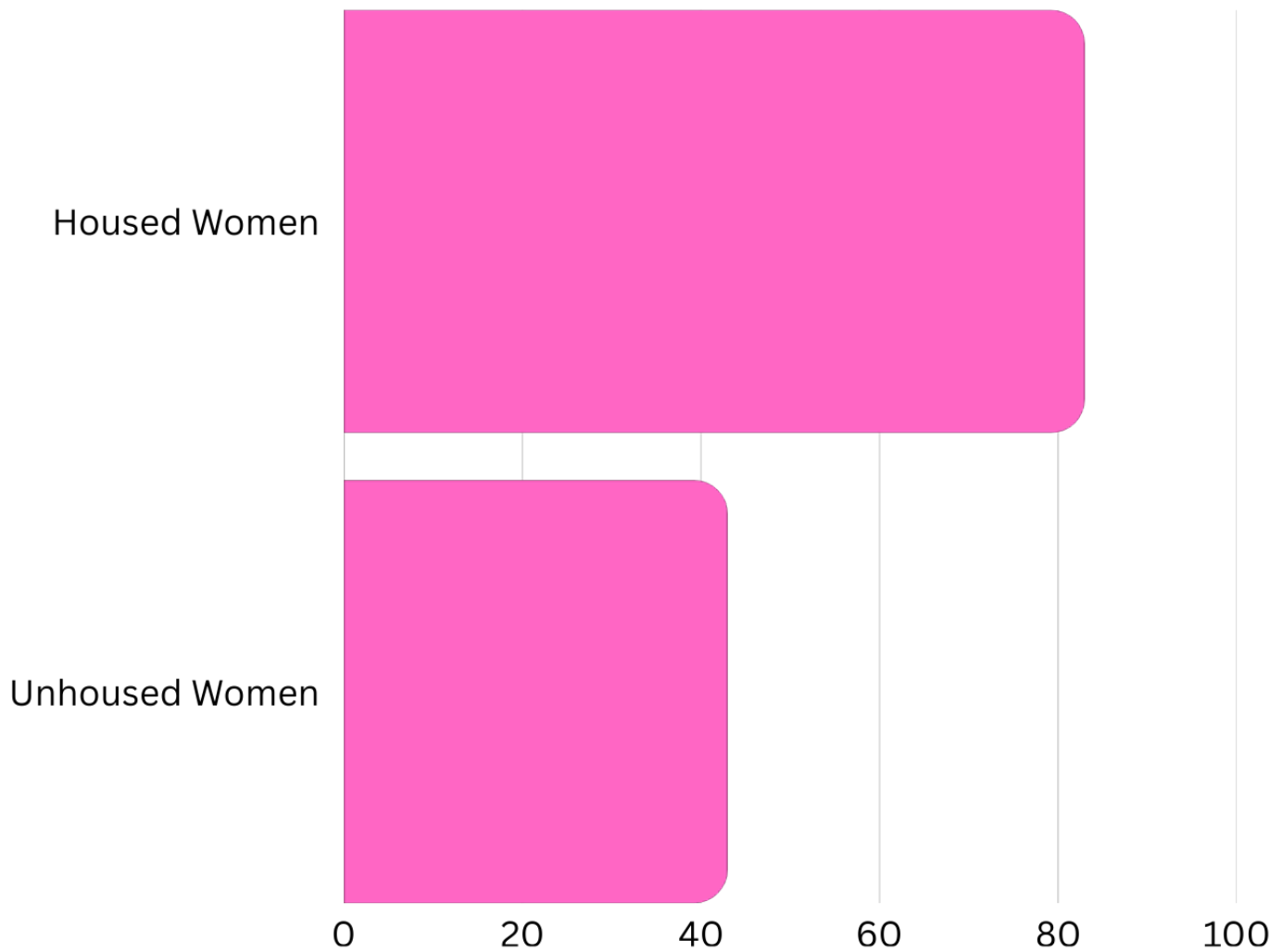
While older women are subjected to deplorable treatment in Skid Row, they also seek strategies to make life in Skid Row more tolerable. Maintaining social connections with other women, sharing information, and providing direct support is a key strategy for older women in Skid Row. For instance, one focus group participant demonstrated the value of having friends in Skid Row when it comes to safety: *“Being in that tent, being in the area where I’m at, it’s safe somewhat. But you never when something come by...and then you want to stab you or beat you up or whatever. So prayer is number one and having friends come over daily, you know. I got to have my little group too, okay?”*

Nevertheless, protective and positive social connections with other women can be challenging to build and maintain amidst the instability of all aspects of life in Skid Row. This is reflected in survey responses, where nearly two-thirds (64%) of older women reported that they often or sometimes felt they had no one to turn to for support, a similar rate for women between the ages of 30-50 (61%). In focus groups, women expressed the desire to have close social connections which they could rely on for support, but also noted the difficulty in maintaining these connections.

When asked to describe what sources of support they desired the most, one woman responded:

“THIS IS THE TIME THAT I NEED PEOPLE I CAN LEAN AND SHOULDER, LIKE NOT FAR AS A MENTOR, BUT SOMEBODY CLOSE TO HIM. BUT EVERY TIME I GET THAT CLOSE, SOMEBODY ALWAYS END UP GOING SOMEWHERE ELSE.”

AVG AGE OF DEATH



DEATH AND DYING IN SKID ROW

Houselessness, particularly among older people, increases mortality risks, as a result of multiple causes ranging from adverse environmental conditions to circulatory and respiratory diseases. Data from the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner Corner between 2014-2018 showed that “male deaths outnumbered female deaths, but the percentage of homeless women who died increased faster than that of men. And although Black people make up fewer than one-tenth of the county’s population, they accounted for nearly a quarter of the homeless deaths”. Stress, a lack of healthy food and prolonged exposure to the elements all contribute to premature death. In Los Angeles County, the average age of death for houseless women is 48 compared to 83 for housed women in California.

Many women reported losing access to essential case management services upon entering transitional housing or shelters. Over half of women aged 30-49 and 45% of women 50 or older no longer received case management support after joining these programs. They also lost access to basic necessities such as food and toiletries. Inadequate support infrastructures, both inside and outside emergency response systems, left many women feeling abandoned. Support programs often fail to help, leaving women isolated, in precarious situations, and facing greater health risks. These conditions also contribute to the increase in mortality rates among unhoused women, as reported in the collected data.



Local shelters are also complicit in this exclusion and abandonment of women living in Skid Row. Daily survival in Skid Row is often marked by acts of omission, where these local shelters mirror a selective space in which access to and services for housing, counseling, childcare, and mental health support can be conditional. Participants shared that the program criteria reflect a rigid, selective process that can be seen as a test of endurance rather than a site of refuge. It pushes people to get used to inconveniences marked by long queues and debilitating conditions. The limited and fragmented access to services enacts a form of hyperinvisibilization since the feeling of being cast outside the formal care system is actively reinforced.

“I’M JUST WAITING WAITING WAITING WAITING. I’M TIRED OF WAITING”

“I FEEL LIKE IF I AM ASKING FOR SOMETHING OVER AND OVER AND I AM WAITING HOURS AND HOURS AND DAYS AND DAYS AND MONTHS, IT’S LIKE, I DON’T THINK YOU REALLY WANNA HELP ME, YOU KNOW. BUT THIS OTHER PERSON THEY’VE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH YOU FOR TWO WEEKS, AND THEY ALREADY HAVE A HOUSING PLAN SET UP.”

It also extends to interactions with case managers that are described as distant or selective, with the burden of securing positive outcomes placed solely on the individual. Access to meaningful support, such as childcare or advocacy are dependent on institutional commitment but on the discretion of specific individuals within the system, including sympathetic case managers, judges, or officers. This individualized, transactional structure leaves women feeling discounted and responsible for navigating an opaque bureaucratic process that heightens a sense of abandonment by systems ostensibly designed to help.

“THEY’RE JUDGING THEM FOR BEING HOMELESS, MOVING FOR, YOU KNOW, THERE NEEDS TO BE CARING HANDS OUT THERE AND NOT JUST, UH, SOMEBODY TO PUT PEOPLE IN INTO A LITTLE SECTION LIKE THIS DOWN HERE IN SKID ROW AND EXPAND OUT THE HOUSING AND, YOU KNOW, UM INTO PUT PEOPLE WHERE IF THEY’RE NOT ON DRUGS OR ALCOHOL OR WHATEVER, IF THEY COME FROM A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND, PUT THEM IN WHERE THEY FIT IN MORE THAN UM TRYING TO KEEP THE PORT IN ONE, ONE AREA”.

The lack of institutional guidance forces women to rely on word-of-mouth networks for survival knowledge. They learned to recognize that deliberately gatekeeping essential information leads to a constant sense of insecurity, and to acknowledge that they are left to figure it out on their own. They are pushed to constantly negotiate, perform, or compete just to receive basic support or safety. Training for survival goes beyond having access to housing, basic food, and health services. It involves developing a keen instinct for navigating a complex system through experience and observation, and being copwise (Stuart, 2016).



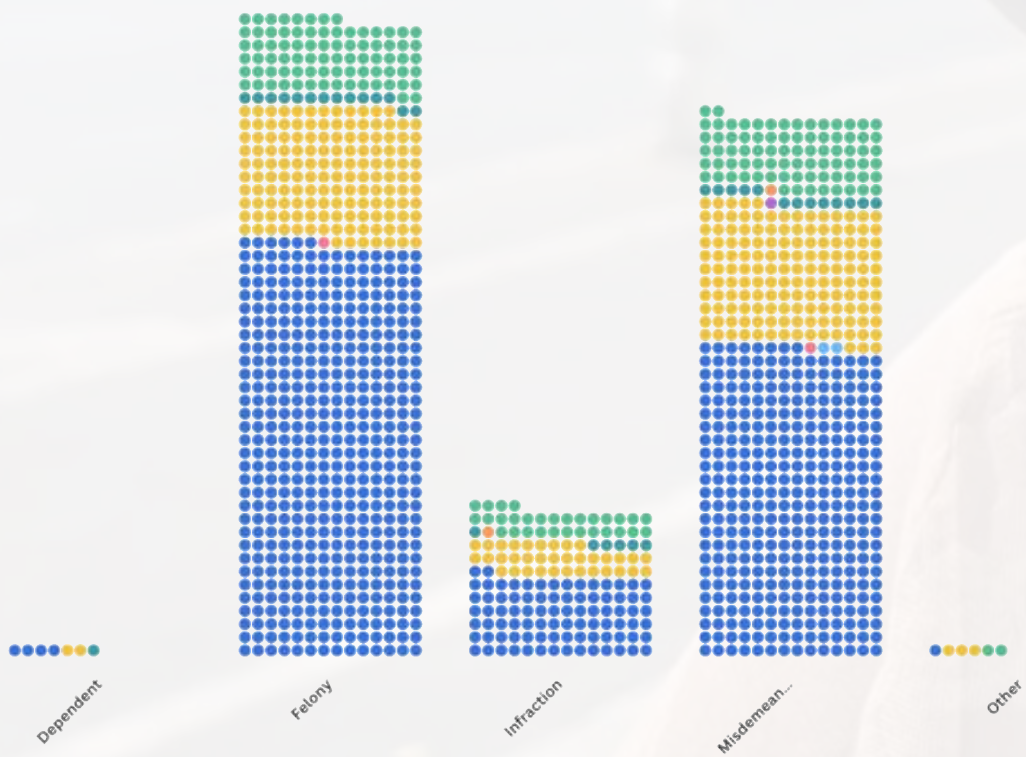
“HE WAS LIKE, “OH, NO I’M GONNA PUSH THIS FOR YOU REALLY HARD AND YOU’RE GONNA BE OUT HERE. AND I’M LIKE, OKAY, HE CALLED A SUPERVISOR, WHICH WAS THE NUMBER I HAD AND SHE WAS LIKE, “OH YEAH, [NAME], YOU KNOW, I WAS JUST TRYING TO REACH OUT. IT’S JUST A MATTER OF WAITING, YOU KNOW, THERE’S NOTHING WE CAN DO RIGHT NOW BECAUSE WE HAVE A PLACE THAT A BUNCH OF FAMILIES ARE IN THAT IS BEING REMODELED OR UNDER MAINTENANCE, SO WE HAVE TO HOUSE THOSE PEOPLE BEFORE WE CAN BRING IN NEW PEOPLE, SO IT’S JUST A MATTER OF WAITING” - P6

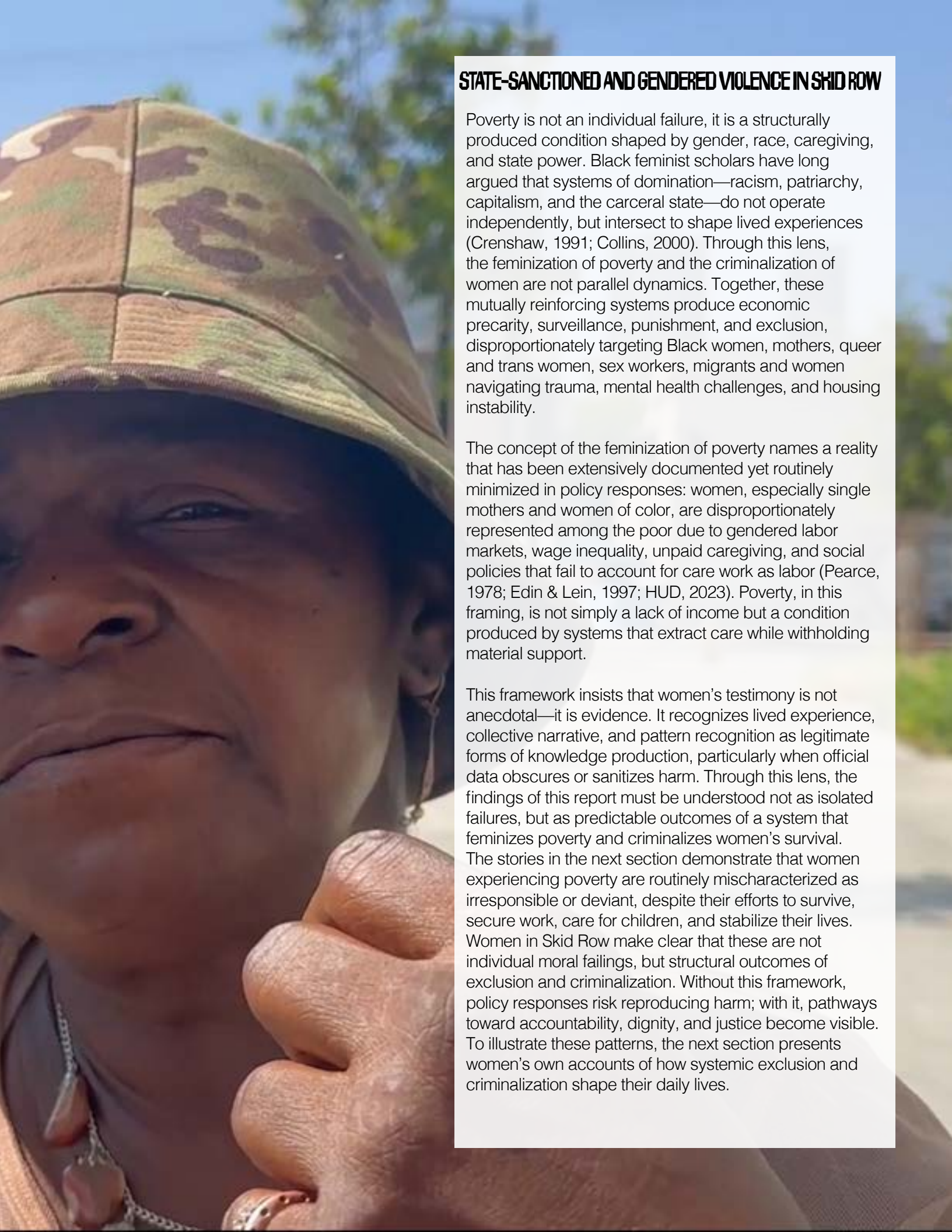
Women’s experiences in Skid Row reveal an endemic crisis that cannot be reduced to simplistic notions of individual hardship. The failure to meet fundamental human needs, such as food, water, healthcare, wellness, and shelter, extends to three core patterns: hyperinvisibilization, which captures how suffering is normalized and rendered invisible. Hypersurveillance refers to behavior being monitored and controlled, yet offering no long-term or genuine care or support. Lastly, acts of omission reflect how institutions neglect to provide meaningful support or to be proactive in responding to urgent requests.





Race Black Chinese Filipino Hispanic/Latin/Mexican Korean Other Other Asian White



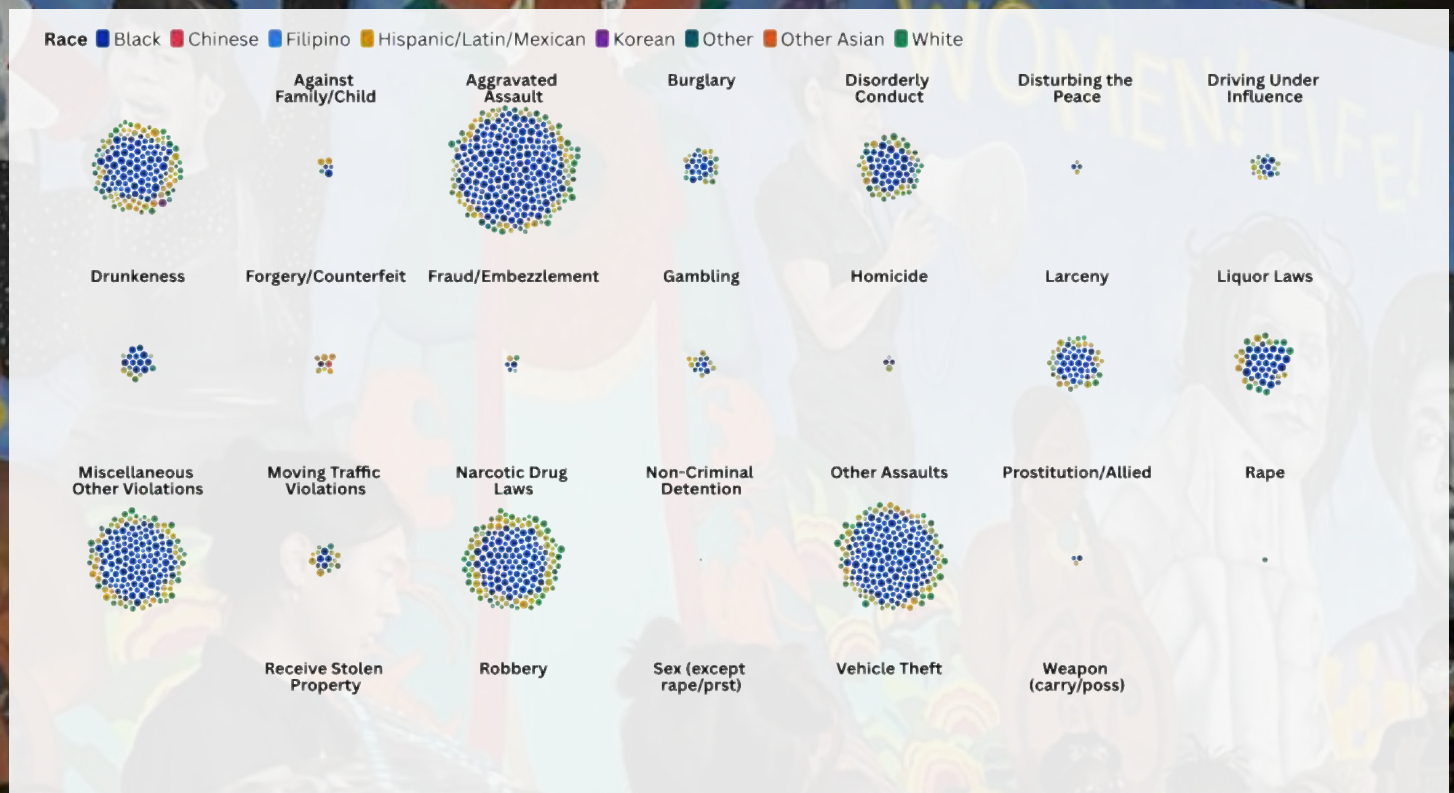


STATE-SANCTIONED AND GENDERED VIOLENCE IN SKID ROW

Poverty is not an individual failure, it is a structurally produced condition shaped by gender, race, caregiving, and state power. Black feminist scholars have long argued that systems of domination—racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and the carceral state—do not operate independently, but intersect to shape lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). Through this lens, the feminization of poverty and the criminalization of women are not parallel dynamics. Together, these mutually reinforcing systems produce economic precarity, surveillance, punishment, and exclusion, disproportionately targeting Black women, mothers, queer and trans women, sex workers, migrants and women navigating trauma, mental health challenges, and housing instability.

The concept of the feminization of poverty names a reality that has been extensively documented yet routinely minimized in policy responses: women, especially single mothers and women of color, are disproportionately represented among the poor due to gendered labor markets, wage inequality, unpaid caregiving, and social policies that fail to account for care work as labor (Pearce, 1978; Edin & Lein, 1997; HUD, 2023). Poverty, in this framing, is not simply a lack of income but a condition produced by systems that extract care while withholding material support.

This framework insists that women's testimony is not anecdotal—it is evidence. It recognizes lived experience, collective narrative, and pattern recognition as legitimate forms of knowledge production, particularly when official data obscures or sanitizes harm. Through this lens, the findings of this report must be understood not as isolated failures, but as predictable outcomes of a system that feminizes poverty and criminalizes women's survival. The stories in the next section demonstrate that women experiencing poverty are routinely mischaracterized as irresponsible or deviant, despite their efforts to survive, secure work, care for children, and stabilize their lives. Women in Skid Row make clear that these are not individual moral failings, but structural outcomes of exclusion and criminalization. Without this framework, policy responses risk reproducing harm; with it, pathways toward accountability, dignity, and justice become visible. To illustrate these patterns, the next section presents women's own accounts of how systemic exclusion and criminalization shape their daily lives.



PATTERNS OF POLICING, CRIMINALIZATION, AND SURVIVAL IN SKID ROW

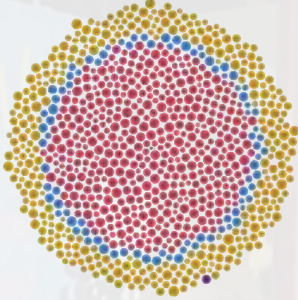
Criminalization in Skid Row is not limited to arrests or citations. It is embodied carcerality that attaches the presumption of guilt to women's very existence (Friedman & Hitchens, 2023). Blackness, poverty, gender, sexuality, disability, and migration status are treated as evidence of criminality. This unfolds through police stops, harassment, and violence, but also through shelters, service providers, and institutions that surveil and punish under the guise of care. Programs like the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) Data-Informed Community Focused Policing (DICFP) and its "Neighborhood Engagement Areas"/SARA zones label whole blocks of Skid Row as "problem areas," justifying constant patrols, surveillance cameras, and targeted arrests. In one short SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) period in 2021, LAPD recorded 50 arrests on a few blocks of Skid Row. These arrests do not produce safety but heighten women's vulnerability. For Black mothers, this includes family policing through the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), where children are kidnapped under

the presumption of neglect rooted in anti-Blackness and poverty. For trans women and sex workers, it means vice stings, sexual violence, and constant policing of survival.

The criminalization of women in Skid Row is deeply informed by Los Angeles' longer history of carceral policies targeting Black communities in neighborhoods like South Central, which rapidly expanded and intensified policing, surveillance, and incarceration measures across the city. From the War on Crime and Drugs to the inseparable legacy of Broken Windows policing, Los Angeles' carceral state has created a landscape of experimentation where bodies continue to be dispossessed, criminalized, and surveilled for simply surviving the very conditions these policies produce. Under Broken Windows policing—a pseudoscientific practice imported and aggressively operationalized under former LAPD Chief William Bratton and embedded in LAPD practice since the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative in 2005—poverty was reframed as "disorder," transforming

Arrest Type ■ Dependent ■ Felony ■ Infraction ■ Misdemeanor ■ Other

Black



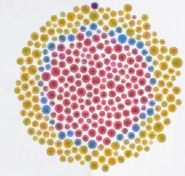
Chinese



Filipino



Hispanic/Latin/Mexican



Korean



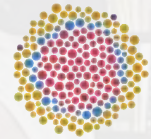
Other



Other Asian



White



everyday survival into a condition through which domestic warfare against racialized bodies was justified (Gurusami & Kurwa, 2021). In Skid Row, this meant that every action, and even inaction, became suspicious: standing, sitting, resting, walking with children, congregating for safety, or simply existing in public space. Women, particularly Black women, were uniquely targeted within this framework. Single women of a certain age, mothers without housing, children playing or running, and people engaged in informal survival economies were cast as evidence of social decay rather than as people navigating abandonment by the state. Broken Windows did not reduce harm; it created a permanent state of threat in which women were presumed guilty before any law was broken. This logic of presumed criminality has also deeply informed the ways surveillance measures continue to expand across Los Angeles, particularly through the use of aerial surveillance technologies. The LAPD reports that it operates “the largest municipal airborne law-enforcement program in the world,” with approximately 17 helicopters used to monitor, track, and document racialized poverty across Skid Row, South Central, and similar neighborhoods (Witt, 2023). Today’s “data-informed” policing programs like DICFP and SARA, including intensified aerial surveillance

measures, are not departures from this history but its technological evolution; translating the same logic of suspicion into maps, metrics, and patrol patterns that continue to criminalize gender, poverty, and Blackness as conditions of disorder.

For women in Skid Row, criminalization is daily life. It is banishment through sweeps and displacement, containment through police occupation, blight through organized neglect, extraction through fines and surveillance, and elimination through incarceration and premature death. LAPD claims its violence can be measured in statistics, but force is present every moment women live under the threat of being searched, displaced, or disappeared. These stories uplift the many forms of police violence that go “missing” in our conceptual understandings of how policing is enforced against Black women and women of color (Gonzales, 2025; Ritchie, 2017). Safety cannot be achieved with more violence. The collateral consequences of investing in additional patrols, increased surveillance, and family separation are far greater. Abolition asks us to confront the deeper logic at work: criminalization is not a policy failure but part of a system that continually reproduces harm.

CONCENTRATION OF POLICING, VIOLENCE, AND ARREST

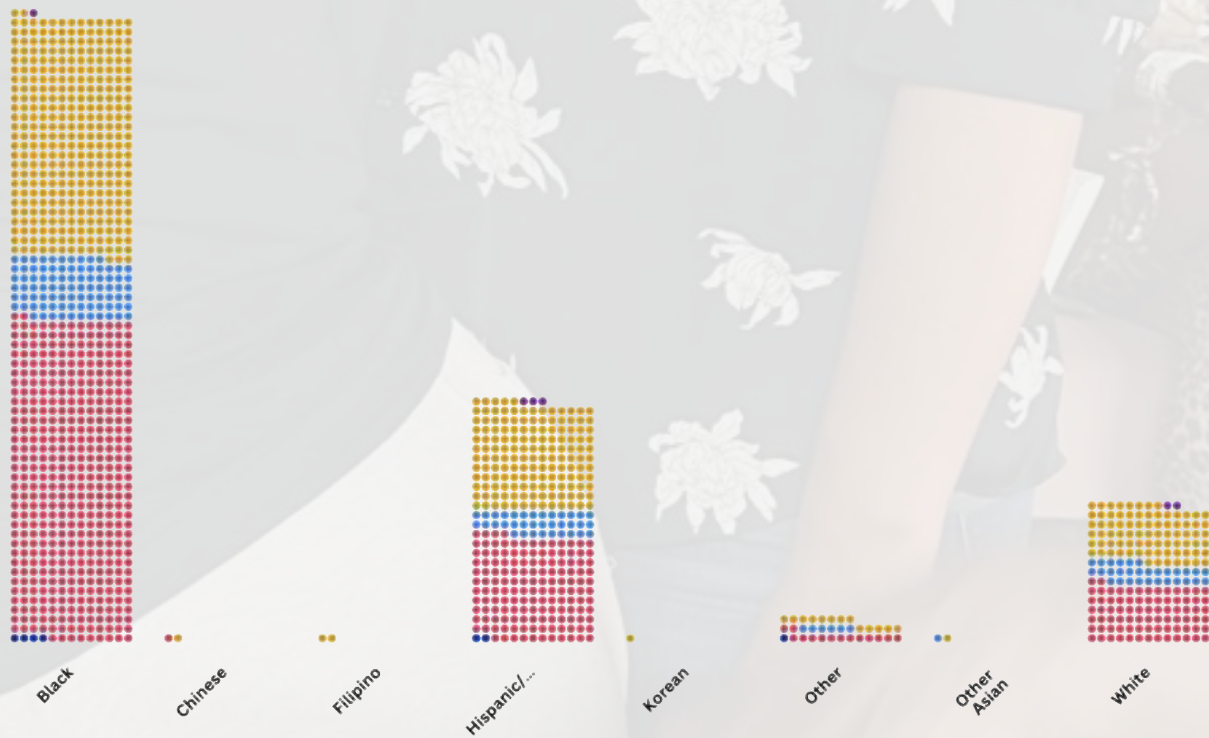
To better understand the concentration of policing within Skid Row, this report uses LAPD arrest records of women in Skid Row from 2020–2025, not because data tells us something we do not already know, but because policing relies on data to legitimize harm. Arrest data is one of the primary ways the state operationalizes criminalization; turning presence into “activity,” survival into “offense,” and gendered vulnerability into threat. But rather than allowing these numbers to speak the language of the police, we deliberately reworked how they are seen. By layering arrest records onto a community-made map developed by women in Skid Row and pairing them with accessible visualizations, we subvert the ways the state weaponizes data. Grounded in Black Feminism, this approach does not seek to prove that policing is violent. It affirms what women already know: criminalization functions as a daily condition of life, and data itself is a technology through which this violence is produced, managed, and made to appear inevitable.

Centering the community map was essential. In an all-day workshop organized during the summer of 2025, women led a community walk through Skid Row, documenting their everyday realities with photos, interviews, and recordings. Committed to capturing how they navigate survival under constant policing and structural neglect, they collectively told a story of resilience and agency. By tracing significant points of arrests, women mapped what the city never records: where police harass and harm, where surveillance is concentrated, where sanitation is weaponized, and where safety is built collectively through mutual care, food sharing, art, and informal networks of protection. When LAPD arrest points were layered on top of this map, the story became unmistakable. Policing clusters precisely where women are forced to survive in public and where the community has already stepped in to fill the gaps left by state abandonment. What the police label as “hot spots” are not sites of danger, they are sites of visibility. Arrests function to make the ground beneath women’s feet temporary, to push people out through tickets, charges, and repeated contact that amount to forced self-deportation from public space.





Arrest Type ■ Dependent ■ Felony ■ Infraction ■ Misdemeanor ■ Other



The arrest data confirms this pattern. Between 2020 and 2024, LAPD arrested women in Skid Row 1,428 times. Of those arrests, 861 targeted Black women and 333 targeted Latina women, confirming that Black women bear the brunt of policing in this neighborhood. Nearly half of all arrests were classified as felonies, a category often shaped by officer discretion rather than actual harm. Hundreds were labeled as “Aggravated” or “Other” assault, a pattern that aligns with the criminalization of self-defense and survival in conditions of constant threat. Arrests for loitering, soliciting, and weapons possession map directly onto everyday acts of living without shelter: resting, engaging in sex work, or carrying items for protection when the city refuses to provide safety. When read alongside the community map, these arrests are revealed not as responses to crime, but as tools of control, used to banish, contain, and discipline women whose very existence has been framed as disorder. What emerges is not a picture of public safety, but of a policing system that manufactures violence and then records it as data.

Over half of surveyed women (50.8%) reported interactions with police or enforcement agents. Legal scholars and sociologists have documented how poverty governance relies on policing, administrative sanctions, and coercive compliance—particularly for unhoused women and mothers (Wacquant, 2009; Gustafson, 2011). Women in this report described not only police encounters, but what Black feminists identify as moral regulation—the everyday policing of women’s bodies and behavior by institutions and the public alike, (Collins, 1990; Ritchie, 2012). This form of policing is deeply gendered and racialized. As Collins (2000) argues, controlling images and respectability narratives function to justify exclusion and punishment while obscuring structural causes. Research consistently shows that public narratives of homelessness rely on tropes of addiction, irresponsibility, and moral failure, despite evidence that housing instability is most often triggered by structural shocks such as job loss, previous incarceration, domestic violence, medical crises, and unaffordable housing (Desmond & Kimbro, 2015). The criminalization of women becomes most visible at points of institutional contact—shelters, security, police, hospitals—where care is replaced with force.

Community-gathered data in this report deepen this picture. In focus groups, women consistently described high-surveillance zones near the Weingart Center and Union Rescue Mission as areas where police presence heightened, rather than reduced, their exposure to harm. Women articulated how surveillance has created conditions in which harassment, stops, and arrests become routine and expected, both inside and near shelters. These spaces were understood as sites where state power is most concentrated, and where the overlap of policing, service provision, and institutional control blurs any distinction between “care” and punishment. At the same time, women described how shelters function as spectacle sites where suffering becomes visible yet remains unaddressed (Hartman, 1997). Moments of crisis, such as mental health breakdowns, violence, and medical emergencies, unfold in public view, often drawing police attention without producing meaningful care or intervention. One participant shared:

“A WOMAN HAD JUST GIVEN BIRTH AND THREW HER NEWBORN OUT THE WINDOW... THE WOMAN WAS FOUND BLEEDING ON THE FLOOR AND THE BABY HAD BEEN THROWN OUT BY THE TIME POLICE CAME AROUND. PEOPLE SUFFER A LOT FROM MENTAL HEALTH IN THE SHELTERS... I DON’T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HER AFTERWARDS... I JUST REMEMBER SEEING A LOT OF COPS OUTSIDE HER ROOM...”

The participant’s account of this incident resonated deeply with many women during other focus groups and workshops. Several participants recalled when news of the incident circulated in the community and described the profound emotional impact it had. Many of them expressed deep concern for the mother and the conditions that may have brought her to such a moment. Others also drew connections to the broader structural realities women face, noting how environments marked by overcrowding, untreated mental health needs, and institutional neglect produce conditions where crises escalate without support. Throughout conversations with women, shelters were frequently described as environments where danger, instability, and trauma accumulate. Women emphasized that police presence in these spaces does little to prevent harm. However, women’s vulnerability to violence, trauma, or distress is routinely used to justify increased police presence, or even arrest, despite the fact that this presence fails to prevent harm.

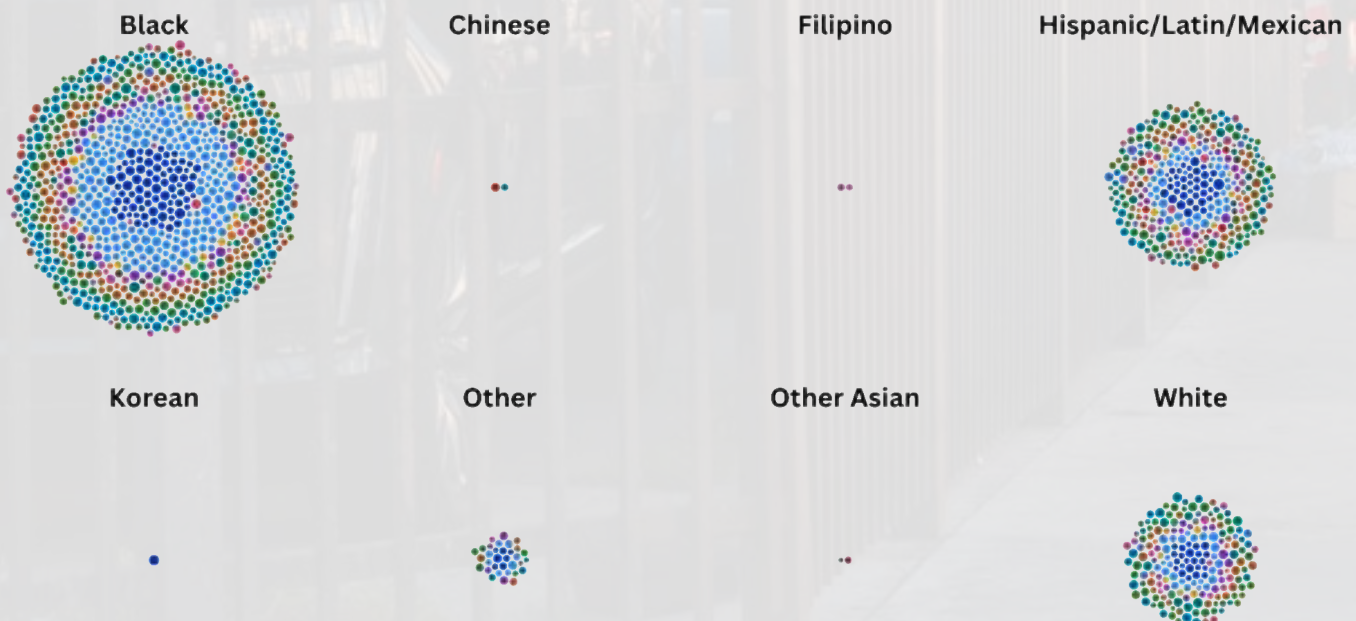
Race Black Chinese Filipino Hispanic/Latin/Mexican Korean Other Other Asian White



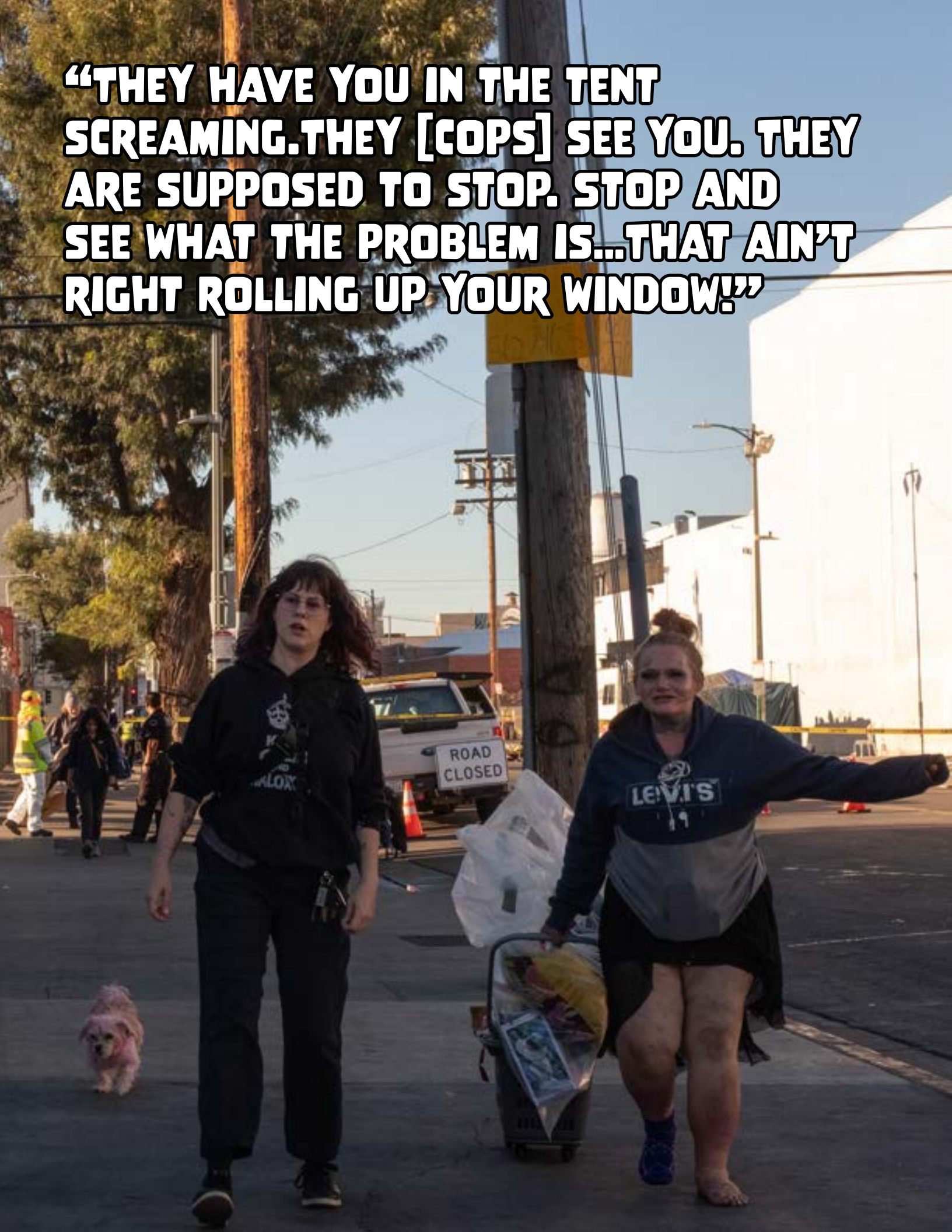
Narratives of “public safety” and “protection” have consistently been used to expand surveillance and enforcement in Skid Row, yet women described these interventions as disconnected from what actually happens. Women in Skid Row are significantly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and in several cases, death. These conditions are made worse by structural neglect, lack of safe housing, and limited access to meaningful protection. Many shared experiences of calling for help during moments of immediate danger only to have officers arrive hours later, if at all, or to dismiss the harm once they did arrive at the scene. Others expressed deep concern about the lack of protection for women, even when violence was visible and ongoing. One participant described witnessing a situation in which a woman was being sexually assaulted in a tent while officers nearby failed to intervene:

Charge Group Description

Against Family/Child	Aggravated Assault	Burglary	Disorderly Conduct	Disturbing the Peace
Driving Under Influence	Drunkenness	Forgery/Counterfeit	Fraud/Embezzlement	Gambling
Homicide	Larceny	Liquor Laws	Miscellaneous Other Violations	Moving Traffic Violations
Narcotic Drug Laws	Non-Criminal Detention	Other Assaults	Prostitution/Allied	Rape
Receive Stolen Property	Robbery	Sex (except rape/prst)	Vehicle Theft	Weapon (carry/poss)



**“THEY HAVE YOU IN THE TENT
SCREAMING.THEY [COPS] SEE YOU. THEY
ARE SUPPOSED TO STOP. STOP AND
SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS...THAT AIN'T
RIGHT ROLLING UP YOUR WINDOW!”**



In these moments, policing does not function as protection but as absence—revealing a system more invested in monitoring women than in responding to their safety. This absence of intervention often becomes women's first introduction to Skid Row, shaping their experiences at multiple points in their journey. In the context of the experience above, this moment reveals that even in spaces under constant surveillance, harm continues unchecked, demonstrating that the presence of law enforcement does not translate into safety for women. The persistence of violence in tents underscores the failure of policing as a protective force, instead functioning to monitor and control rather than to prevent harm. As participants described, rather than acting as first responders, officers are often positioned as passive witnesses to abuse against women, particularly Black women, reinforcing a system where violence is seen but not stopped. When asked about these patterns of inadequate protection from gender-based violence, participants expressed the urgency of developing their own practices of survival to navigate these experiences upon arrival. One participant shared a strategy of survival she had to co-create with her daughter-in-law after being abruptly evicted shortly after arriving in the United States. She described how they set up an encampment:

“UN TRABAJADOR SOCIAL QUE ME VISITA ENTONCES ME DIJO, NO AHÍ ESPERATE PORQUE YO DIJE...VINE A LEVANTAR UN REPORTE POR UM NO ME ACUERDO...PORQUE ME HABÍAN ROMPIDO LA CARPA?... MMM NO SE, EL CHISTE ES QUE AHÍ ESPERAMOS. DICE AHÍ ESPERATE, TE VOY A LLEVAR COMIDA. YA LLEGÓ, ME REGALÓ UNA CARPETA. PERO, A ELLA NO LE DIJO NADA, ES MÁS LE DIJE LLEGA Y ACUÉSTATE. YO NO DORMÍ PARA ESTARLA CUIDANDO. ACUÉSTATE AQUÍ, QUE TE VALGA ME DICE, NO TE PUEDEN DECIR NADA. TU SABES QUE NO HAY OTRO LUGAR MÁS MEJOR OSEA A NO CORRER PELIGRO. DONDE MÁS CORREMOS PELIGRO?...ELLOS [LA POLICÍA] SI QUIEREN TE PUEDEN METER A LA CÁRCEL. Y PUES SI, “MEJOR ACUÉSTATE Y DUÉRMETE”

TRANSLATION

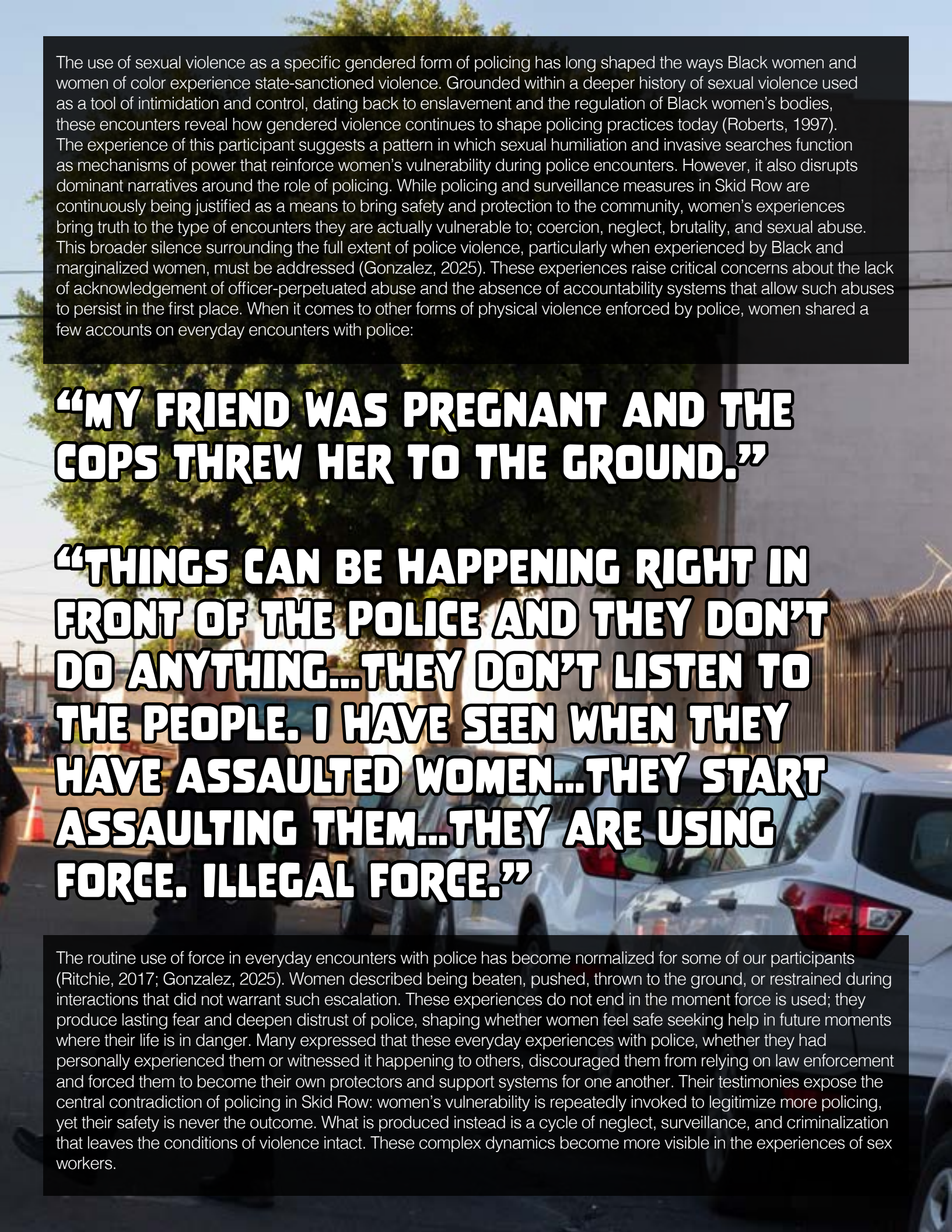
“A SOCIAL WORKER WHO WAS VISITING ME THEN TOLD ME, “WAIT THERE,” BECAUSE I SAID... I HAD COME TO FILE A REPORT BECAUSE, UM, I DON'T REMEMBER... BECAUSE THEY [NEIGHBORS] TORE MY TENT? HMM, I DON'T KNOW, THE POINT IS WE WAITED THERE. HE SAID, “WAIT THERE, I'M GOING TO BRING YOU FOOD.” HE ARRIVED, AND HE GAVE ME A CARPET. BUT HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO HER [DAUGHTER-IN-LAW]; IN FACT, I TOLD HER, “COME IN AND LIE DOWN.” I DIDN'T SLEEP SO I COULD BE WATCHING OVER HER. “LIE DOWN HERE, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT,” SHE TOLD ME. “THEY CAN'T SAY ANYTHING TO YOU. YOU KNOW THERE'S NO BETTER PLACE, I MEAN, WHERE WE'RE NOT IN DANGER.” WHERE ELSE ARE WE IN DANGER?... THEY [THE POLICE] CAN PUT YOU IN JAIL IF THEY WANT. AND WELL, YES, “IT'S BETTER TO LIE DOWN AND GO TO SLEEP.”

Here, the participant reflects on how setting up an encampment with her daughter-in-law made her feel safer because she was not alone. As part of their strategy to protect one another from potential sexual and physical violence, she chose to stay awake through the night so she could keep watch over both of them. Many women spoke about how lack of sleep becomes a constant reality, driven by fear for their safety, the loud conditions of shelters, and the unpredictability of life on the street. However, participants also described how staying awake is often forcibly transformed into a mechanism of survival, not only to protect themselves but also to protect and care for one another. In this context, sleeplessness becomes not simply a consequence of instability, but a form of vigilance women must adopt to prevent additional vulnerabilities to harm. Despite knowing that setting up an encampment could expose them to arrest, these women, along with others, continue to rely on these strategies as necessary forms of protection in environments where safety is not guaranteed.



This gap between the mainstream justification for increased policing and women's everyday experiences with police inaction continued to emerge as an important theme across focus groups. Women described how police presence often intensifies only after harm occurs, through arrests, citations, and displacement, rather than intervening to prevent violence in the first place. Survivors recounted being ignored when reporting assault, harassment, or threats. Others described the barriers they faced when attempting to report harm because of the lack of support available to women when completing incident report forms due to issues such as inaccessibility, language barriers, and other obstacles. In several other instances, women themselves had become victims of physical and sexual abuse from officers. One of the participants recalled a vivid experience she had with a police officer at the age of 19:

“THERE IS TOO MUCH AGGRESSION IN HOW THEY HANDLE ME. THEY HAVE TAKEN ME TO THE SIDE OF THE WALL AND PULLED MY PANTS DOWN. THEY PUT MY BOXER BRIEFS DOWN WHILE THEY HAD MY HANDS HANDCUFFED TO THE WALL...THE ONLY REASON I DIDN'T GET ARRESTED DURING THAT ARREST SEARCH WAS BECAUSE THEY GOT A CALL ABOUT A SHOOTING... THEY THREW ALL MY SHIT AND LEFT. I STILL HAD MY BRIEFS DOWN. I WAS 19 YEARS OLD.”



The use of sexual violence as a specific gendered form of policing has long shaped the ways Black women and women of color experience state-sanctioned violence. Grounded within a deeper history of sexual violence used as a tool of intimidation and control, dating back to enslavement and the regulation of Black women's bodies, these encounters reveal how gendered violence continues to shape policing practices today (Roberts, 1997). The experience of this participant suggests a pattern in which sexual humiliation and invasive searches function as mechanisms of power that reinforce women's vulnerability during police encounters. However, it also disrupts dominant narratives around the role of policing. While policing and surveillance measures in Skid Row are continuously being justified as a means to bring safety and protection to the community, women's experiences bring truth to the type of encounters they are actually vulnerable to; coercion, neglect, brutality, and sexual abuse. This broader silence surrounding the full extent of police violence, particularly when experienced by Black and marginalized women, must be addressed (Gonzalez, 2025). These experiences raise critical concerns about the lack of acknowledgement of officer-perpetuated abuse and the absence of accountability systems that allow such abuses to persist in the first place. When it comes to other forms of physical violence enforced by police, women shared a few accounts on everyday encounters with police:

“MY FRIEND WAS PREGNANT AND THE COPS THREW HER TO THE GROUND.”

“THINGS CAN BE HAPPENING RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE POLICE AND THEY DON'T DO ANYTHING...THEY DON'T LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE. I HAVE SEEN WHEN THEY HAVE ASSAULTED WOMEN...THEY START ASSAULTING THEM...THEY ARE USING FORCE. ILLEGAL FORCE.”

The routine use of force in everyday encounters with police has become normalized for some of our participants (Ritchie, 2017; Gonzalez, 2025). Women described being beaten, pushed, thrown to the ground, or restrained during interactions that did not warrant such escalation. These experiences do not end in the moment force is used; they produce lasting fear and deepen distrust of police, shaping whether women feel safe seeking help in future moments where their life is in danger. Many expressed that these everyday experiences with police, whether they had personally experienced them or witnessed it happening to others, discouraged them from relying on law enforcement and forced them to become their own protectors and support systems for one another. Their testimonies expose the central contradiction of policing in Skid Row: women's vulnerability is repeatedly invoked to legitimize more policing, yet their safety is never the outcome. What is produced instead is a cycle of neglect, surveillance, and criminalization that leaves the conditions of violence intact. These complex dynamics become more visible in the experiences of sex workers.

INSTITUTIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST SEX WORKERS





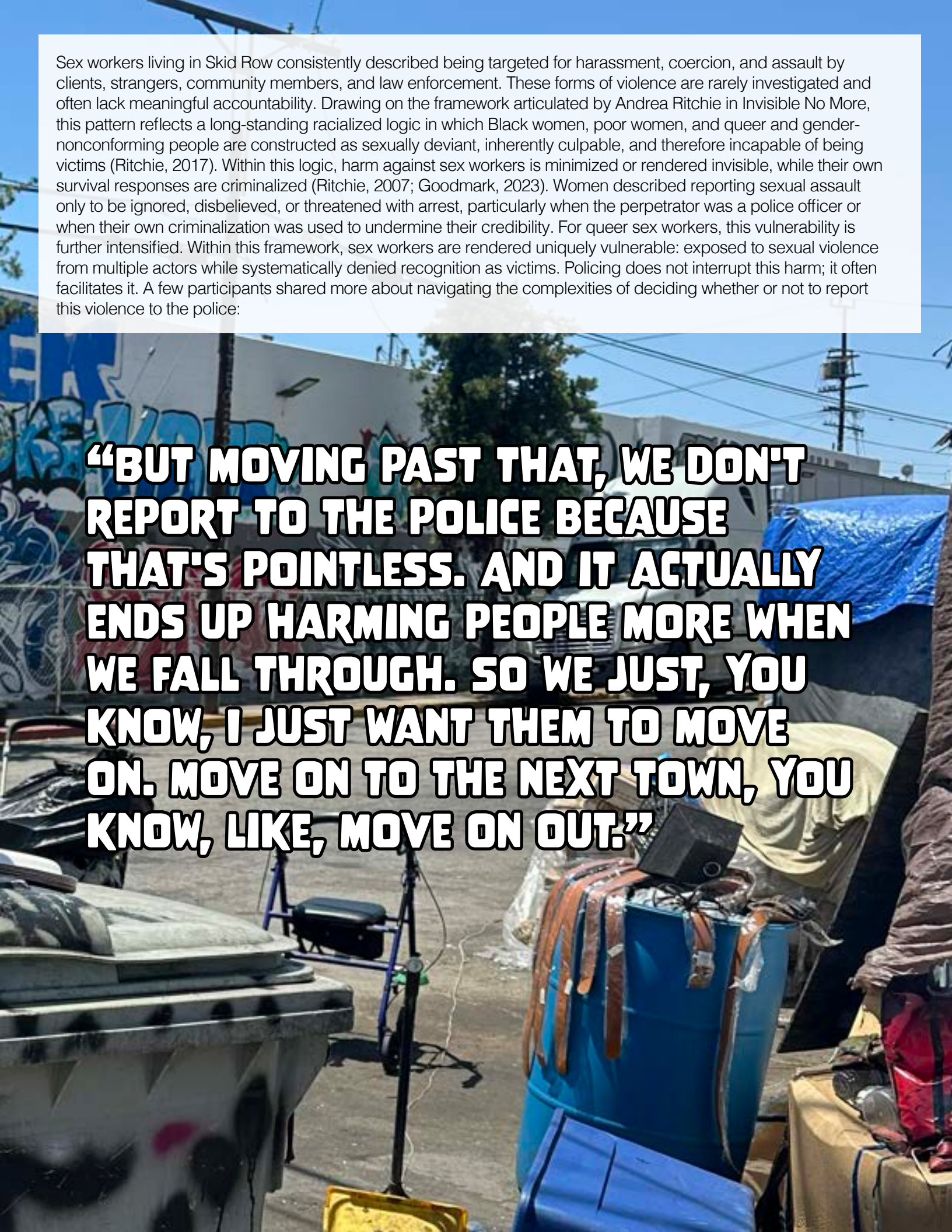
Sex workers are rendered both hyper-visible and erased. They are hyper-visible as symbols of disorder where they are constantly marked by law enforcement and media narratives as “prostitutes,” trafficking victims, or threats to neighborhood stability. At the same time, they are erased as community members navigating constrained economic conditions, racialized poverty, and systemic abandonment. These controlling images do not operate only at the level of representation. They materialize as intensified patrols, normalized surveillance, discretionary stops, and enforcement practices that treat women’s visibility as presumptive criminality (Collins, 1990). This dynamic reflects broader systems that regulate bodies marked by race, gender, poverty, and visibility in public space (Ritchie, 2017; Friedman & Hitchens, 2022).

Women in Skid Row engage in sex work in ways that reflect both agency and structural constraint, including chosen labor that deserves dignity, autonomy, and decriminalization, as well as survival strategies produced by housing exclusion, economic precarity, and state abandonment. Policing in Skid Row collapses these realities. It operates at the level of the body: monitoring where women stand, how they move, how visible they are, and whether they are deemed to belong. As the community map shows, the spaces where women gather for survival, mutual aid, and informal safety are the same spaces labeled by law enforcement as enforcement “hot spots.” It becomes clear that what is being criminalized is not harm, but bodily visibility itself— particularly the visibility of Black women whose survival has long been framed as requiring regulation (Ritchie, 2017). This regulation of women’s bodies has profound consequences for the lack of urgency surrounding their gendered experiences.

One participant shared:

“...FORGET IT WITH RAPE KITS AND ALL OF THAT STUFF. IT'S JUST LIKE A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME, BECAUSE THEY'RE NEVER GONNA GET TO TEST IT, ANYWAY... ESPECIALLY WOMEN IN SKID ROW...OUR PEOPLE GET MURDERED IN HOUSING. AND WE'VE SEEN THIS HAPPEN MULTIPLE TIMES WHERE WOMEN GET MURDERED IN HOUSING. AND IT'S OKAY BECAUSE THEY'RE SEX WORKERS. YOU KNOW, SEX WORKER BODIES DON'T COUNT AS ACTUAL HUMAN BEINGS. AND THERE'S THIS PERSPECTIVE FROM PROVIDERS TO THE ENTIRE SYSTEM, TO THE STREET THAT USE, ESPECIALLY SEX WORKER BODIES AS COMPLETELY DISPOSABLE, AND NEED TO NOT RESPOND TO RAPES OF SEX WORKERS IN ANY WAY COMPARED TO HOW WE'VE EVER BEEN STRUCTURED”

Sex workers living in Skid Row consistently described being targeted for harassment, coercion, and assault by clients, strangers, community members, and law enforcement. These forms of violence are rarely investigated and often lack meaningful accountability. Drawing on the framework articulated by Andrea Ritchie in *Invisible No More*, this pattern reflects a long-standing racialized logic in which Black women, poor women, and queer and gender-nonconforming people are constructed as sexually deviant, inherently culpable, and therefore incapable of being victims (Ritchie, 2017). Within this logic, harm against sex workers is minimized or rendered invisible, while their own survival responses are criminalized (Ritchie, 2007; Goodmark, 2023). Women described reporting sexual assault only to be ignored, disbelieved, or threatened with arrest, particularly when the perpetrator was a police officer or when their own criminalization was used to undermine their credibility. For queer sex workers, this vulnerability is further intensified. Within this framework, sex workers are rendered uniquely vulnerable: exposed to sexual violence from multiple actors while systematically denied recognition as victims. Policing does not interrupt this harm; it often facilitates it. A few participants shared more about navigating the complexities of deciding whether or not to report this violence to the police:



“BUT MOVING PAST THAT, WE DON'T REPORT TO THE POLICE BECAUSE THAT'S POINTLESS. AND IT ACTUALLY ENDS UP HARMING PEOPLE MORE WHEN WE FALL THROUGH. SO WE JUST, YOU KNOW, I JUST WANT THEM TO MOVE ON. MOVE ON TO THE NEXT TOWN, YOU KNOW, LIKE, MOVE ON OUT.”

**“POLICE DON'T WANT TO
DO THE INVESTIGATION.
IT'S JUST QUICKER TO BE
LIKE, OH, YOU FILED A
FALSE REPORT AND WE'LL
JUST ARREST YOU.”**

ye kill you

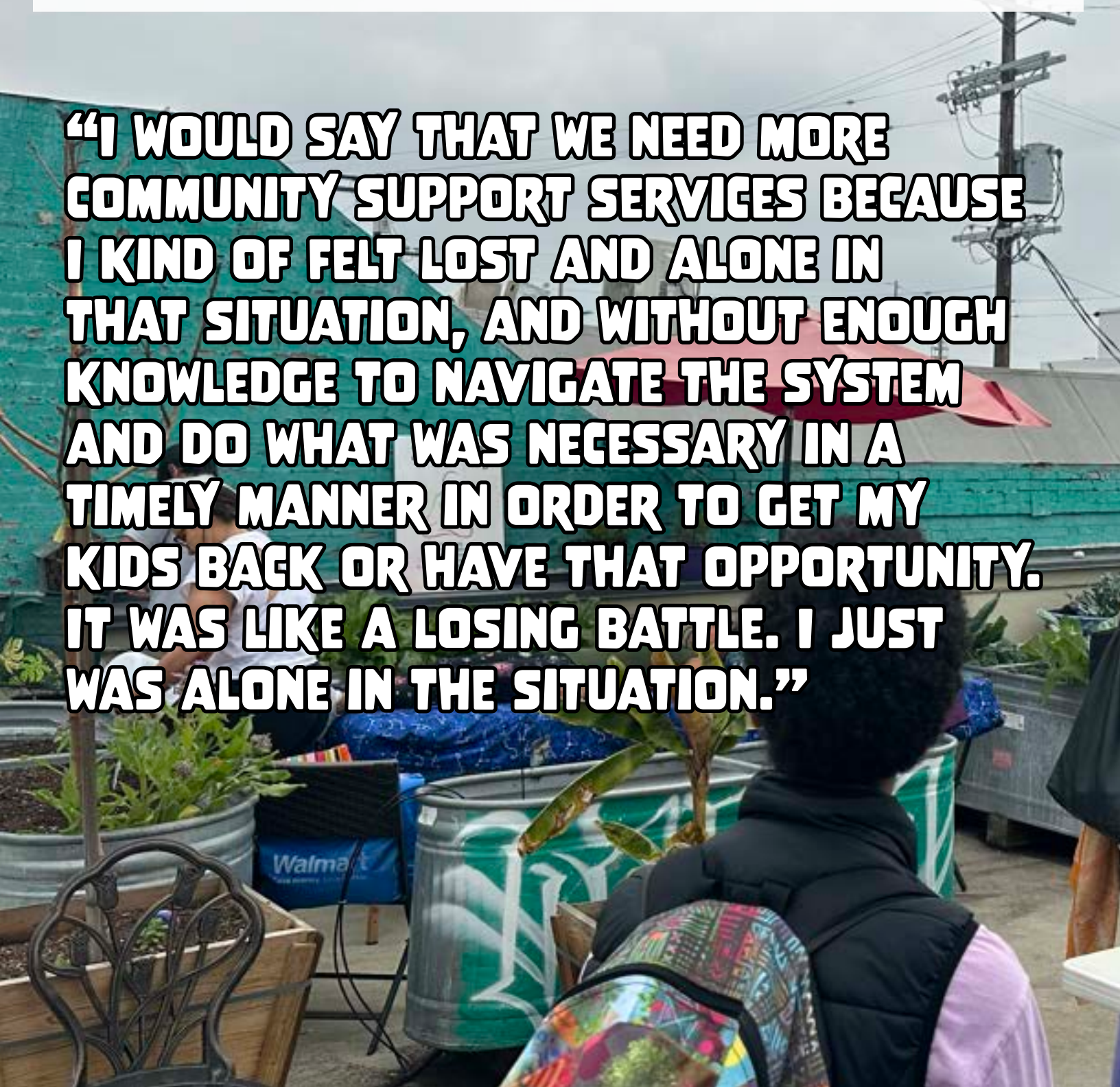
Rather than investigating harm, women shared that police frequently rely on discretion to dismiss reports as false or unfounded, transforming survivors into suspects. These examples highlight a common experience amongst sexual violence survivors where the legal system denies women's positions as victims, especially for sex workers, but actively disciplines them into silence. This exclusion from police protection is what drives many women to look for support amongst each other (Gonzalez, 2025). One participant shared:

“BUT YOU KNOW...YOU GOT TO STICK TOGETHER. I DON'T CARE IF I DON'T LIKE YOU. IF YOU'RE HAVING A PROBLEM WITH A MALE, WE HAVE TO STICK TOGETHER...IF WE DON'T STICK TOGETHER, THEN WE'RE DONE... IF YOU'RE GETTING HELP, STICK TOGETHER, WE'VE GOT TO STICK TOGETHER. ALL WE HAVE IS US AND SPREADING INFORMATION. YOU KNOW, SPREAD INFORMATION. IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME, I WANT TO GET THAT TO YOU, SO THAT YOU KNOW, IF YOU HAVE TO MANAGE THEM. LOOK, I NEED TO HEAR THAT BECAUSE I DON'T WANNA HAVE THAT EXPERIENCE, YOU KNOW, IF I GO THROUGH THAT I DON'T NEED TO GO THROUGH THAT, TOO, YOU KNOW.”

The participant's statement reveals how women develop collective strategies for safety in response to institutional abandonment. Rather than relying on police systems that frequently dismiss or criminalize their experiences, women create their own networks of warning, accountability, and care. In this context, “sticking together” becomes a situated survival strategy shaped by structural exclusion from formal protections (Jones, 2009). Information-sharing becomes a critical tool for survival, allowing women to navigate environments where violence is anticipated but institutional support is unreliable. Outside of these experiences, women's vulnerability to violence does not end with policing in public space. For mothers in this report, it extends into the family policing system, where surveillance, punishment, and dispossession are enacted through child welfare interventions.

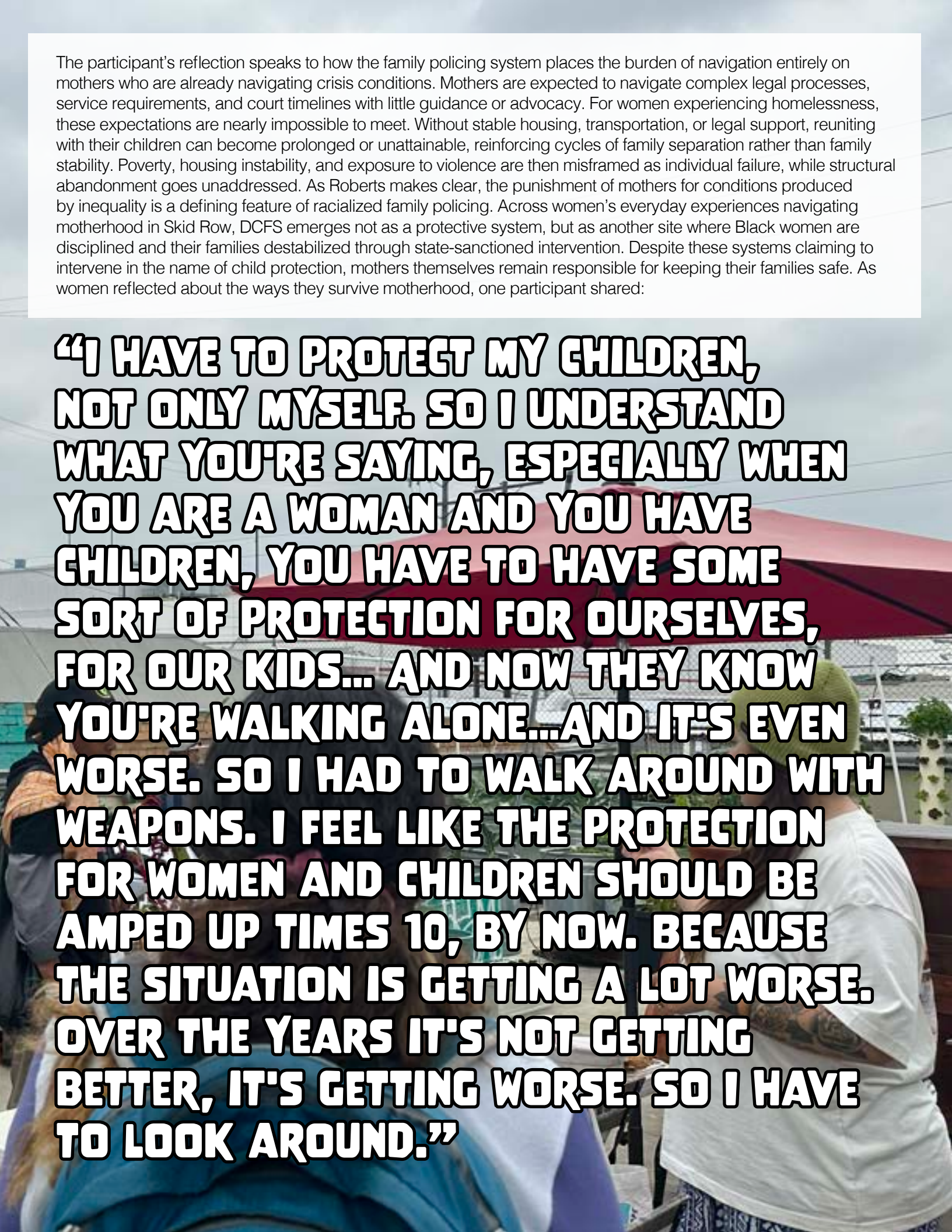
FAMILY POLICING AND VIOLENCE AGAINST MOTHERS IN SKID ROW

Dorothy Roberts notes that systems like the Department of Child Protective Services (DCSF), function less as mechanisms of child protection and more as tools for regulating Black women's bodies, reproduction, and caregiving under the guise of care (Roberts 2022). For women in Skid Row, interactions with DCFS were described as a constant threat rather than a source of support. Participants described fearing that seeking help or reporting violence could trigger investigations, child removal, or increased surveillance of their parenting. Once in the family policing system, many participants described a lack of guidance and support to help them navigate the process and take the necessary steps to reunite with their children. One mother shared:

A photograph of a person with dark hair, seen from the back, wearing a black vest over a pink shirt and a large, colorful, patterned backpack. They are sitting in a community garden or rooftop space. In the foreground, there are several large metal planters filled with green plants. A blue Walmart shopping bag is visible on the ground. In the background, there are green-painted walls, a red umbrella, and a utility pole with wires. The sky is overcast.

**“I WOULD SAY THAT WE NEED MORE
COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES BECAUSE
I KIND OF FELT LOST AND ALONE IN
THAT SITUATION, AND WITHOUT ENOUGH
KNOWLEDGE TO NAVIGATE THE SYSTEM
AND DO WHAT WAS NECESSARY IN A
TIMELY MANNER IN ORDER TO GET MY
KIDS BACK OR HAVE THAT OPPORTUNITY.
IT WAS LIKE A LOSING BATTLE. I JUST
WAS ALONE IN THE SITUATION.”**

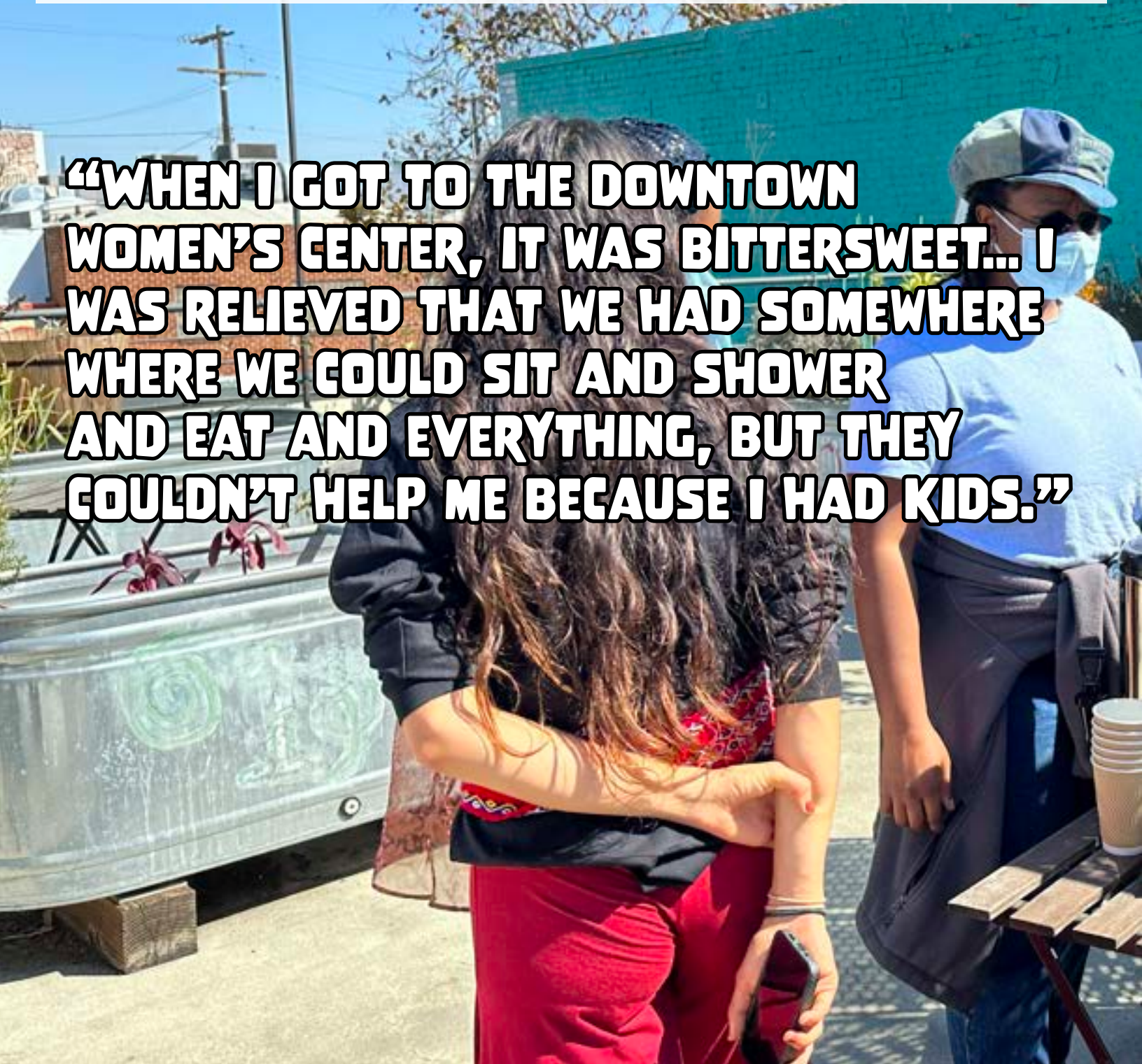
The participant's reflection speaks to how the family policing system places the burden of navigation entirely on mothers who are already navigating crisis conditions. Mothers are expected to navigate complex legal processes, service requirements, and court timelines with little guidance or advocacy. For women experiencing homelessness, these expectations are nearly impossible to meet. Without stable housing, transportation, or legal support, reuniting with their children can become prolonged or unattainable, reinforcing cycles of family separation rather than family stability. Poverty, housing instability, and exposure to violence are then misframed as individual failure, while structural abandonment goes unaddressed. As Roberts makes clear, the punishment of mothers for conditions produced by inequality is a defining feature of racialized family policing. Across women's everyday experiences navigating motherhood in Skid Row, DCFS emerges not as a protective system, but as another site where Black women are disciplined and their families destabilized through state-sanctioned intervention. Despite these systems claiming to intervene in the name of child protection, mothers themselves remain responsible for keeping their families safe. As women reflected about the ways they survive motherhood, one participant shared:



"I HAVE TO PROTECT MY CHILDREN, NOT ONLY MYSELF. SO I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE A WOMAN AND YOU HAVE CHILDREN, YOU HAVE TO HAVE SOME SORT OF PROTECTION FOR OURSELVES, FOR OUR KIDS... AND NOW THEY KNOW YOU'RE WALKING ALONE...AND IT'S EVEN WORSE. SO I HAD TO WALK AROUND WITH WEAPONS. I FEEL LIKE THE PROTECTION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN SHOULD BE AMPED UP TIMES 10, BY NOW. BECAUSE THE SITUATION IS GETTING A LOT WORSE. OVER THE YEARS IT'S NOT GETTING BETTER, IT'S GETTING WORSE. SO I HAVE TO LOOK AROUND."

This participant expressed the urgent need to protect her children, reflecting the deep fear many mothers share regarding their children's safety. At the same time, her account reveals the real complexities mothers must navigate while surviving institutional neglect. In attempting to protect their children, mothers often adopt survival strategies that can be misinterpreted through a framework of criminalization. Actions taken to ensure safety, such as carrying weapons or remaining hyper-vigilant, emerge from conditions of insecurity rather than deviance. Yet this example also uplifts how these same strategies can expose mothers to further policing and surveillance, placing women in a precarious position where the very efforts to protect their families can also make them vulnerable to punishment, producing an ever-ending web of state-violence.

Women's stories throughout this report also help expand our understanding of additional actors that further complicate these types of gendered experiences. One woman described the contradiction at the heart of many service systems:



“WHEN I GOT TO THE DOWNTOWN WOMEN’S CENTER, IT WAS BITTERSWEET... I WAS RELIEVED THAT WE HAD SOMEWHERE WHERE WE COULD SIT AND SHOWER AND EAT AND EVERYTHING, BUT THEY COULDN’T HELP ME BECAUSE I HAD KIDS.”

Shelter and housing systems are frequently designed around an individual subject—ungendered, unattached, and unencumbered by dependents—rendering mothers administratively “too complex” to serve. Scholars have noted that women with children are often excluded not because of need, but because family configurations strain program capacity and funding models (Desmond, 2016; National Women’s Law Center, 2020). Caregiving becomes grounds for exclusion rather than support.

Nearly 7 in 10 surveyed women (68.5%) reported that they have children. This alone challenges dominant narratives that frame unhoused women as unattached individuals rather than caregivers navigating family survival under extreme constraint. At the same time, women with children consistently reported being excluded from shelter and housing options. Survey responses show that women with children were significantly more likely to report barriers to placement, longer wait times, fewer placement options, higher rates of program exclusion or outright denial due to family size and eligibility restrictions, despite being among the most vulnerable to harm. In practice, the system incentivizes separating families, discouraging disclosure, and punishing women for caregiving under crisis conditions. Women named this dynamic plainly:



“THERE IS LESS OPPORTUNITY AND MORE DISCRIMINATION WITH WOMEN WITH CHILDREN BECAUSE IT’S EASIER TO PLACE ONE PERSON THAN IT IS THREE OR FOUR.”

This discrimination is not tied to incapacity, illness, or unwillingness to work. It is tied specifically to motherhood and speaks to how state systems regulate and punish Black motherhood in particular, framing it as irresponsible, excessive, or burdensome rather than socially necessary (Roberts, 1997; Cooper, 2017). By denying mothers stable housing, state systems reproduce conditions that make families more visible to policing, child welfare surveillance, and punitive interventions, extending the criminalization of poverty and Black motherhood across multiple institutions that claim to provide care. Rather than interrupting harm, these systems reproduce it across generations, with many unhoused people first experiencing homelessness in childhood. These same logics of control extend to the policing of gender, sexuality, and bodily autonomy, shaping the violence experienced by trans women and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals across Skid Row.



VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRANSWOMEN AND 2SLGBTQIA+ INDIVIDUALS

Transwomen experience transmisogyny as described in Julia Serano's novel "Whipping Girl", which defines transmisogyny as not just the expression of transphobia and misogyny, but a unique form of sexism that specifically attacks the combination of being trans and feminine that is rooted in the devaluing of femininity (Serano, Julia. Whipping Girl. 1st Edition, Seal Press, 2007). ***This devaluation of femininity arises from the patriarchal projection of masculinity being superior to femininity and results in those who abandon masculinity to embrace their femininity to become targets of harm and ridicule. Strict societal constructs of gender police trans, nonbinary, and cis women and which contributes to cissexism and patriarchal structures that seek to perpetuate gender-based violence.***

When it comes to trans and gender expansive experiences we must contextualize the prevalent history of colonial violence and cultural erasure such as the 1871 Act where the British government criminalized all hijras, Indian third gender individuals, in a lead up to a focused cultural extermination. Historically, we must also acknowledge that transwomen predate biblical entries as they were priestesses of the goddess Inanna in Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia which is regarded as the "cradle of civilization." The erasure of trans and gender expansive individuals in various cultures, spiritual practices, social structures, and histories is an endeavor by patriarchal, colonial, monotheistic nationalist in order to propagate an agenda of narrative control and cultural subjugation.



The erasure of transpeople is an act that echoes the plights of indigenous and minority populations and mirrors historical genocides such as the Trail of Tears, the Congo Free State of 1885, and the Holocaust.

At the time of writing this, there exists extreme animosity, violence, erasure, political demonization, and scapegoating of transgender and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. This period of political persecution places queer and transgender bodies in danger by jeopardizing their physical safety in addition to accessing much-needed resources such as access to permanent affordable housing, work, healthcare, and food. These perils thus create friction in the ability to trust in political figures or service providers out of fear and survival. Thus, DWAC intends to continue our outreach and collaboration with gender expansive communities in Skid Row to ensure the creation of inclusive pathways to well-being, housing, decriminalization, safety, mental health, and opportunities to rise out of poverty.

Transwomen who are not deemed “passible”, meaning they do not fit the socially perceived beauty fetishized standards of white heterosexual women, are wrongly persecuted by authorities, men, and often cis hetero women indoctrinated to uphold systems of oppression. This acceptable form of gender based violence is not only detrimental to the safety and well being of transwomen, but it puts queer, non-binary, intersex, bipoc, and cis women who do not fall within the rigid societal ideals of womanhood in danger. This form of violence sets standards and expectations of what is tolerable violence against women, especially to cis het men who probe for avenues to demean, devalue, belittle, oppress, harm, and harass women. If the definition of women is not approached within a gender expansive and culturally inclusive lens, then we as a society pardon the abuse of women and uphold exceptions for gender based violence. The very fact that we as a society approach the experience of trans women as separate from women speaks to our societies lack of civility as we devalue women based on stringent eurocentric paradigms that exclude, other, and harm feminine identities.



As transbodies, especially those which carry the additional burden of being a person of color, are traumatized from interactions with both civilians and authorities- this systematically induced trauma perpetuates cycles of poverty, mental health issues, and physical harm. A survey revealed that 45.2% of transwomen experienced discrimination by community shops based solely on their gender expression. Social and institutional acceptable bigotry against trans and queer women places all women at risk by creating avenues for gender-based bias, hate crimes, and violence.

For transwomen and gender expansive people, survey data suggests that they are even more vulnerable in regards to criminalization and discrimination while living in Skid Row. With 36.1% of transwomen and queer people being criminalized by police based on their life circumstances, many transwomen and queer people are barred from reporting systematic abuse out of fear of repercussions. This leaves transwomen and gender expansive people mired in perpetual cycles of poverty, systemic violence, and oppression. This fear is rooted in lived experiences ranging from housing to basic healthcare.. As one trans woman puts it,



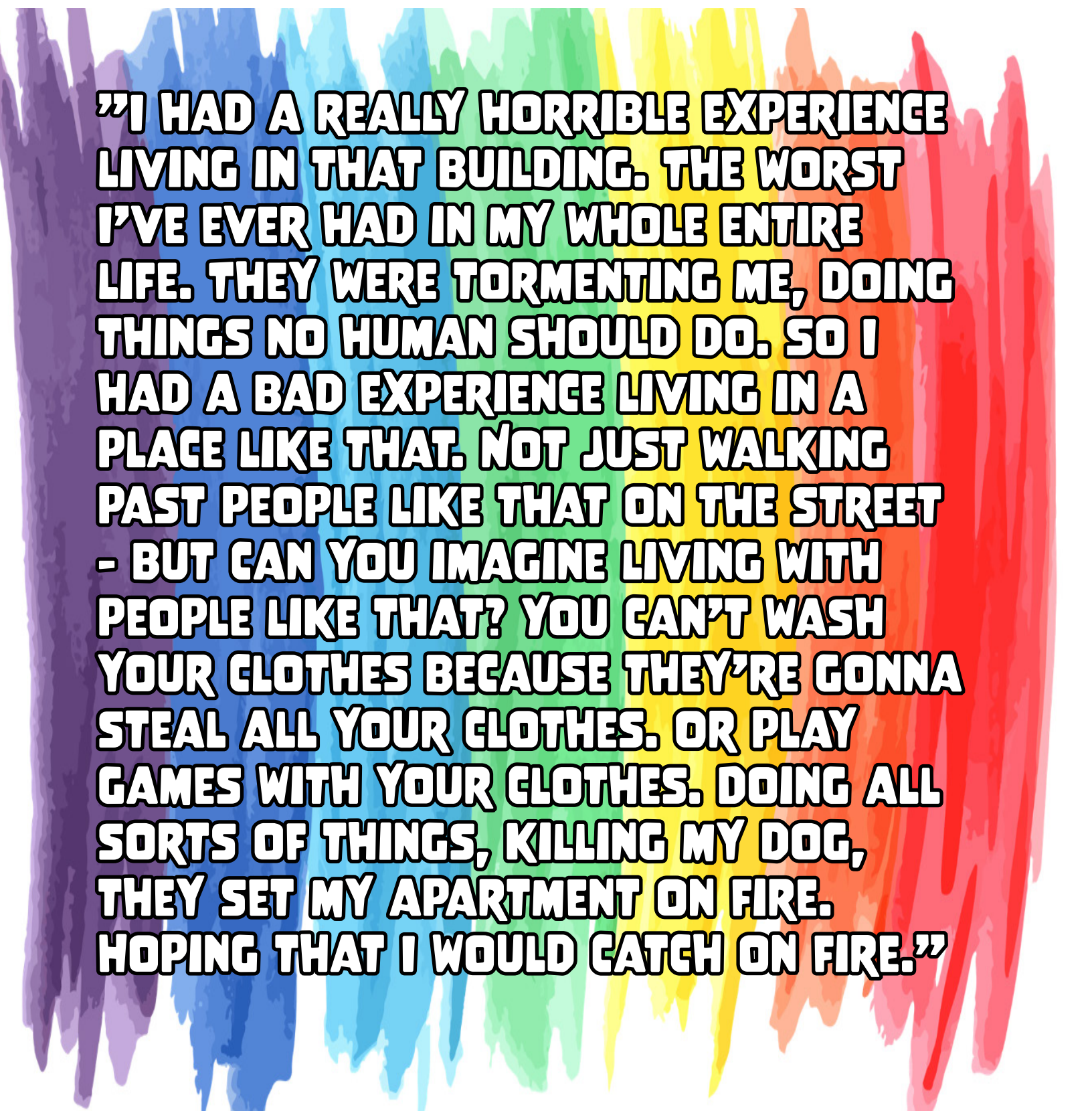
**“WHEN I REALIZE
I HAVE TO DRESS
FOR THE DOCTOR, IT
PUTS ME OUTSIDE OF
MYSELF. I DIDN'T COME
FROM A TIME WHERE
THEY WERE TRYING TO
ACCOMMODATE YOU OR
RESPECT YOU.”**

The need to blend into a cis-hetero society is an incumbency that prevents transwomen from accessing critical mental and physical health resources. It also reveals the copious systemic biases that saturate service providers.

"AND IT WASN'T JUST THE TENANTS, IT WAS THE PEOPLE WORKING THERE. THEY DID SOMETHINGS TO ME, THEY MADE ME MOVE ALL MY STUFF OUT OF MY APARTMENT THAT I HAD PAID FOR. MADE ME MOVE IT TO THE BASEMENT, FOR THEM TO STEAL ALL MY STUFF, AND LEAVE ME AN APARTMENT WITH NO STOVE."

The service providers such as shelter staff and food distributors are built on cis heteronormative structures that exclude and other transwomen and gender expansive people. In a focus group, a transwoman speaks to the harassment they endured from building management and/or staff and reveals how this manifested in real time , When bias is allowed to seep into public resources it not only places lives at risk, but diminishes trust in governing bodies and systems of authority- especially if that authority or governing power criminalizes victims, fails to preserve the physical or emotional of an oppressed minority, or refuses to uphold its intended purposes.

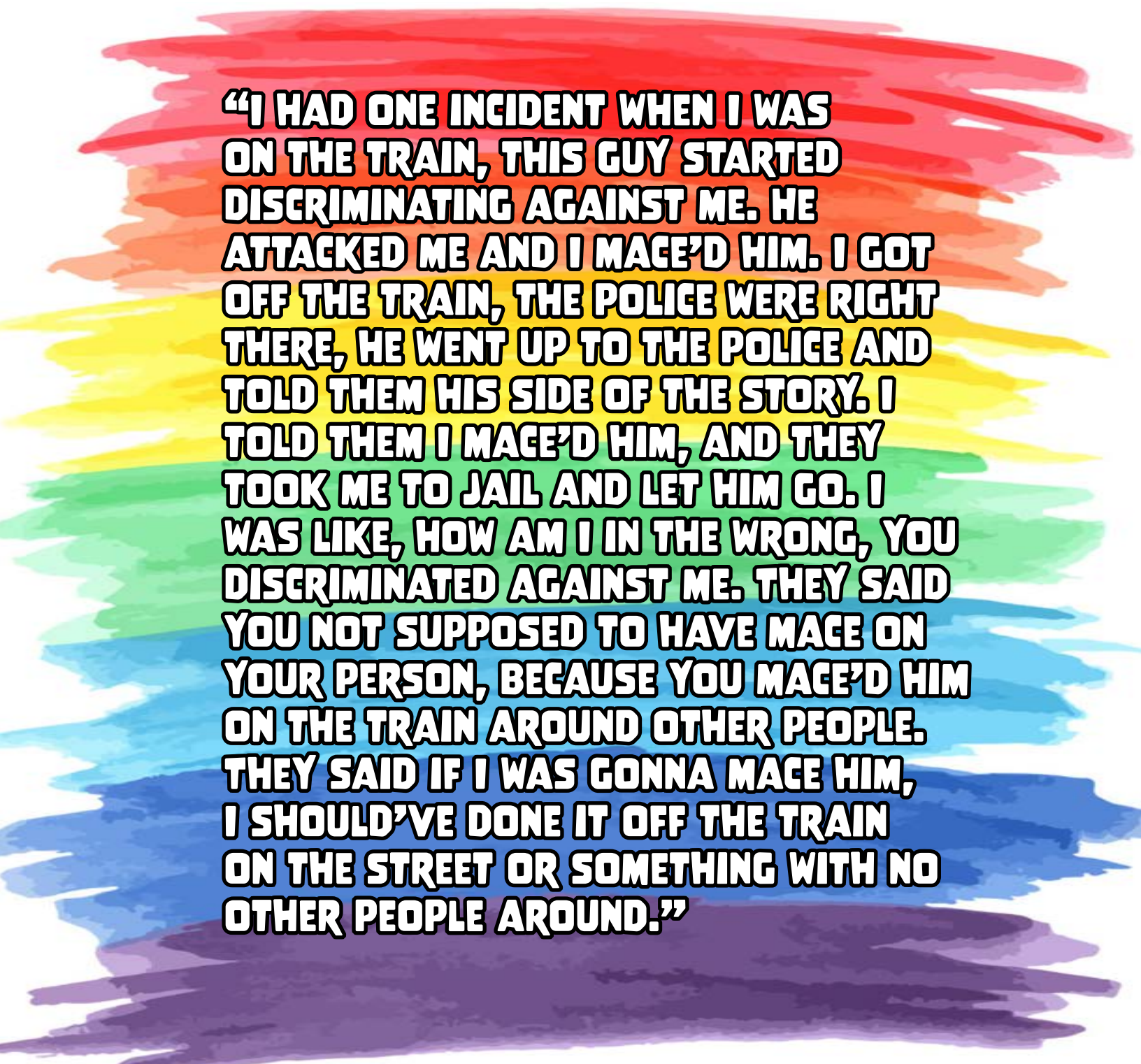
Anti-queerness and transmisogyny are so rooted within patriarchal and colonial systems that it is difficult to find safety in private spaces such as one's own home. One transwoman speaks to the experience of being dehumanized within her own apartment as a result of transmisogyny,



”I HAD A REALLY HORRIBLE EXPERIENCE LIVING IN THAT BUILDING. THE WORST I’VE EVER HAD IN MY WHOLE ENTIRE LIFE. THEY WERE TORMENTING ME, DOING THINGS NO HUMAN SHOULD DO. SO I HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE LIVING IN A PLACE LIKE THAT. NOT JUST WALKING PAST PEOPLE LIKE THAT ON THE STREET - BUT CAN YOU IMAGINE LIVING WITH PEOPLE LIKE THAT? YOU CAN’T WASH YOUR CLOTHES BECAUSE THEY’RE GONNA STEAL ALL YOUR CLOTHES. OR PLAY GAMES WITH YOUR CLOTHES. DOING ALL SORTS OF THINGS, KILLING MY DOG, THEY SET MY APARTMENT ON FIRE. HOPING THAT I WOULD CATCH ON FIRE.”

The discrimination allowed by authority figures sets the precedent for the public. This makes it especially difficult to elevate oneself out of poverty when there is no authority figure, law, safe space, or readily available resource necessary to protect victims of transmisogyny or enforce repercussions to individuals who abuse their power, induce harm, or force themselves onto transwomen and gender expansive people.

Transmisogyny is so engrained into our culture that cis het individuals are not only empowered, but emboldened to exercise violence and verbal harassment in public spaces knowing they will not face repercussions. This includes confined spaces such as public transportation where it is nigh impossible to escape harassment. To exacerbate the matter, transwomen and gender expansive people that do not adhere to a colonial standard of gender binaries are treated like a social contagion by both the public and law enforcement. In the following account, a transwoman shares her experience in being persecuted by police officers for protecting herself from physical and verbal violence:



“I HAD ONE INCIDENT WHEN I WAS ON THE TRAIN, THIS GUY STARTED DISCRIMINATING AGAINST ME. HE ATTACKED ME AND I MACE'D HIM. I GOT OFF THE TRAIN, THE POLICE WERE RIGHT THERE, HE WENT UP TO THE POLICE AND TOLD THEM HIS SIDE OF THE STORY. I TOLD THEM I MACE'D HIM, AND THEY TOOK ME TO JAIL AND LET HIM GO. I WAS LIKE, HOW AM I IN THE WRONG, YOU DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ME. THEY SAID YOU NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE MACE ON YOUR PERSON, BECAUSE YOU MACE'D HIM ON THE TRAIN AROUND OTHER PEOPLE. THEY SAID IF I WAS GONNA MACE HIM, I SHOULD'VE DONE IT OFF THE TRAIN ON THE STREET OR SOMETHING WITH NO OTHER PEOPLE AROUND.”



Police and the civil authorities that prioritize policing over access to essential human needs do not respect, acknowledge, value, or care to educate themselves on the unique needs and challenges of transwomen or gender expansive people. Therefore the system continues to perpetuate a necessity of self preservation under violent, ignorant, and discriminatory social and institutional practices. Contemporary violence against transwomen echoes historical violence used to create friction between minority populations as a distraction from the constant systematic violence enacted by agents of colonialism. Transmisogyny is a weapon used to decentralize and disenfranchise community power. Yet despite the unrelenting violence against trans women of color, there continues to be a narrative of trans and queer resistance. Transwomen directing their time and energy to community building are reclaiming the power of their stories. Thus transwomen and gender expansive individuals' narratives are symbols of hope, pillars of fortitude, and figures that illuminate the tenacity and power of indigenous and minority people in the fight for liberation and material change.

MECHANISMS OF SURVIVAL

Women in Skid Row have built micro systems of care that replace what public infrastructure refuses to provide. Survival is a collective labor under racial capitalism and carceral governance. Mechanisms of survival show up in the data as patterns—resource-sharing, informal safety networks, strategic invisibility, refusal of harmful services, mapping safe spaces and danger zones in Skid Row, a “greenbook” of survival.

They also show up in testimony: the small decisions that become life-or-death (where to sleep, how to dress, when to speak, who to trust, what to carry, when to disappear). It shows up in the battles of resistance in our minds and bodies, the struggle for liberation is waged in consciousness and flesh. Women refuse to accept narratives that cast us as broken, irresponsible, or disposable—when our bodies convulse, when our mind shuts down, or explodes, these are acts of protection, of rebellion, a claim of agency over our lives. It shows up as Chef Bless feeding the block through constant disruption of sweeps and state theft, Ebony and Rosy organizing mothers to protect one another and speak out against the snatching of children, Miss D holding down a safe place for trans women, with the community sharing—and guarding—the knowledge of where safety actually is. The Women’s Needs Assessment itself is a survival mechanism: documentation as protection, testimony as evidence, analysis as narrative change.

The arrest data and community mapping also make clear that survival itself is what gets policed in Skid Row. When resting, protecting oneself, trading labor, or seeking connection becomes groups for arrest, women are forced to develop strategies to stay alive in conditions designed to endanger them. The same actions that keep women safe, like staying awake at night to avoid harm, carrying tools for protecting, or leaning on informal economies, are the very behaviors the police interpret as suspicious or “disorder.” This convergence of criminalization and survival reveals the trap women are placed in: to live is to be surveilled, and to cope is to be punished. Women described a range of mechanisms they rely on to endure daily violence and organized abandonment, including sleeplessness to stay alert, spiritual and religious grounding, self-advocacy, emotional numbing, substance use to manage pain, and isolation to avoid harm. Sex work emerged as both a survival strategy and a site of intense targeting, where women are criminalized for meeting basic needs under conditions of state abandonment. Others described carrying self-defense weapons or calling police on threats [as acts of last resort]. These strategies reflect resilience and refusal to disappear, but they also expose the cruelty of a system that forces women to navigate safety through tactics that the state then labels criminal. Survival is not the problem, policing and state violence is.





COMMUNITY VISIONS & SOLUTIONS

The findings presented in this report are clear and consistent. Women in Skid Row are not experiencing short-term or episodic homelessness; many are facing prolonged and repeated displacement. They are not disconnected from services; rather, they are often cycling through multiple systems without achieving long-term housing stability. Compliance requirements, documentation barriers, and eligibility thresholds frequently delay or prevent access to permanent housing, while enforcement and surveillance mechanisms have expanded.

Across surveys, interviews, and focus groups, women consistently described housing instability as structural, enduring, and shaped by intersecting factors including racism, sexism and gendered violence, financial insecurity, and prior system involvement. Participants reported that enforcement practices have intensified even as access to affordable (to all), permanent housing remains an illusion. Health conditions worsen in environments marked by sustained economic disinvestment, family separation is exacerbated by housing precarity, and informal survival strategies are frequently met with criminalization.

The following recommendations reflect community-identified priorities and collective analysis. They extend the framework established in the 2020 Women's Report and respond to the realities of the current landscape. These recommendations are directed toward policymakers, housing authorities, service providers, and public institutions responsible for shaping housing policy, allocating resources, and designing programs that affect the lives of women in Skid Row.



HOUSING AS A NON-NEGOTIABLE HUMAN RIGHT

Prioritize Permanent, Unconditional Housing Over Transitional Warehousing

- Shift funding away from prolonged interim and transitional housing models that delay stability.
- Guarantee direct pathways to permanent housing without compliance-based barriers.
- Eliminate sobriety requirements, mental health mandates, or behavioral eligibility screens as prerequisites for housing.
- End policies that require women to prove “readiness” while remaining unhoused.

We are not asking to be managed. We just need housing.

Protect Skid Row Residents’ Right to Remain in Skid Row

- Establish a Skid Row Resident Priority Policy for all new and rehabilitated housing built in Skid Row, outlining specific plans for women living in Skid Row.
- Protect from banishment through development tied to mega-events like the World Cup, Super Bowl and Olympics.
- Ensure that long-term residents are not replaced by applicants from wealthier neighborhoods through preferential scoring systems.

Skid Row housing must first serve Skid Row residents.

Immediate Eviction Protections and Tenant Safeguards

- Expand eviction defense funding for women facing removal.
- Create automatic right-to-counsel in eviction proceedings.
- Establish rapid response protections for women facing landlord harassment, illegal lockouts, and utility shutoffs.
- Guarantee enforcement against predatory landlords and SRO operators.

Housing instability is often triggered by landlord abuse and administrative opacity. Prevention must begin there.

Invest in Public Housing and Use Vacant Land

- Convert publicly owned vacant lots and underutilized buildings into housing that can be used for women and families.
- Create a permanent fund to master lease empty residential units for the long-term, prioritizing women and families for these units.
- Mandate that housing be affordable for people with low income and no income.
- Make sure that adaptive reuse policies benefit the housing needs of those who are houseless and/or precariously housed.

Public land must serve public survival.

INVEST IN FAMILIES, NOT SYSTEMS THAT BREAK THEM

End the Penalization of Mothers

- Guarantee shelter and housing placements for entire families—no separation.
- Prohibit Child Welfare involvement triggered solely by poverty or housing status.
- Increase family-centered housing capacity in and around Skid Row.

Women were clear: “All of us or none of us.” Motherhood must not be treated as a liability.

DECRIMINALIZATION AND PROTECTION FROM STATE VIOLENCE

End Local Ordinances that Criminalize Poverty and Homelessness

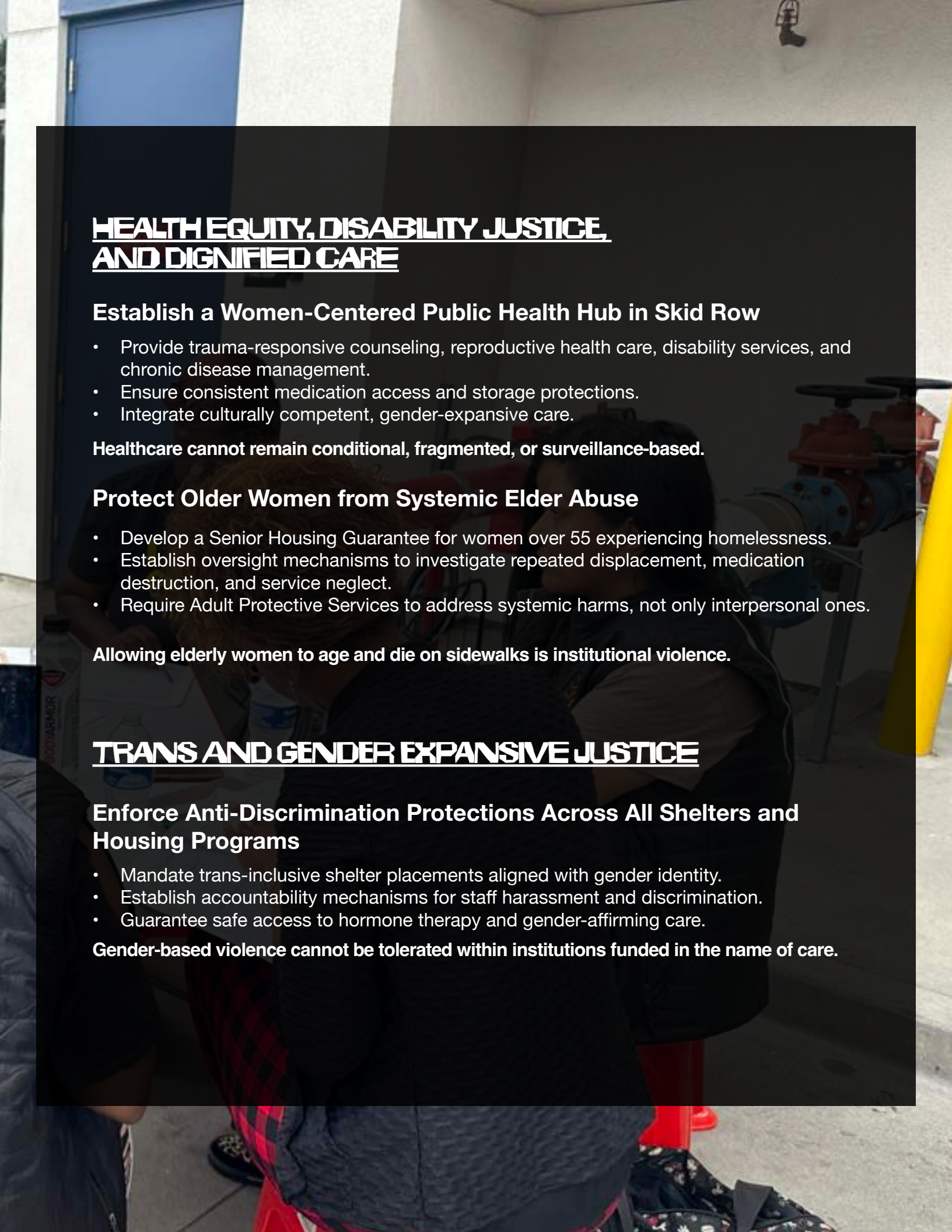
- Repeal Los Angeles municipal ordinances (LAMC) 41.18 and 56.11, which prohibit basic survival activities in public spaces like sitting, sleeping, and storing personal belongings
- End encampment sweeps, particularly the act of destroying medication, documents, and structure for survival.

Criminalizing existence is not a housing strategy.

Redirect Police Expansion Funds Toward Housing and Health

- Divest from enforcement models tied to “corridor policing” and SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) zones that concentrate surveillance in targeted communities.
- Reallocate portions of the nearly \$3 billion Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) budget toward permanent housing production and community-based health services.
- Establish a People’s Budget process that includes Skid Row residents in fiscal decision-making.

Women named it plainly: give us the money.



HEALTH EQUITY, DISABILITY JUSTICE, AND DIGNIFIED CARE

Establish a Women-Centered Public Health Hub in Skid Row

- Provide trauma-responsive counseling, reproductive health care, disability services, and chronic disease management.
- Ensure consistent medication access and storage protections.
- Integrate culturally competent, gender-expansive care.

Healthcare cannot remain conditional, fragmented, or surveillance-based.

Protect Older Women from Systemic Elder Abuse

- Develop a Senior Housing Guarantee for women over 55 experiencing homelessness.
- Establish oversight mechanisms to investigate repeated displacement, medication destruction, and service neglect.
- Require Adult Protective Services to address systemic harms, not only interpersonal ones.

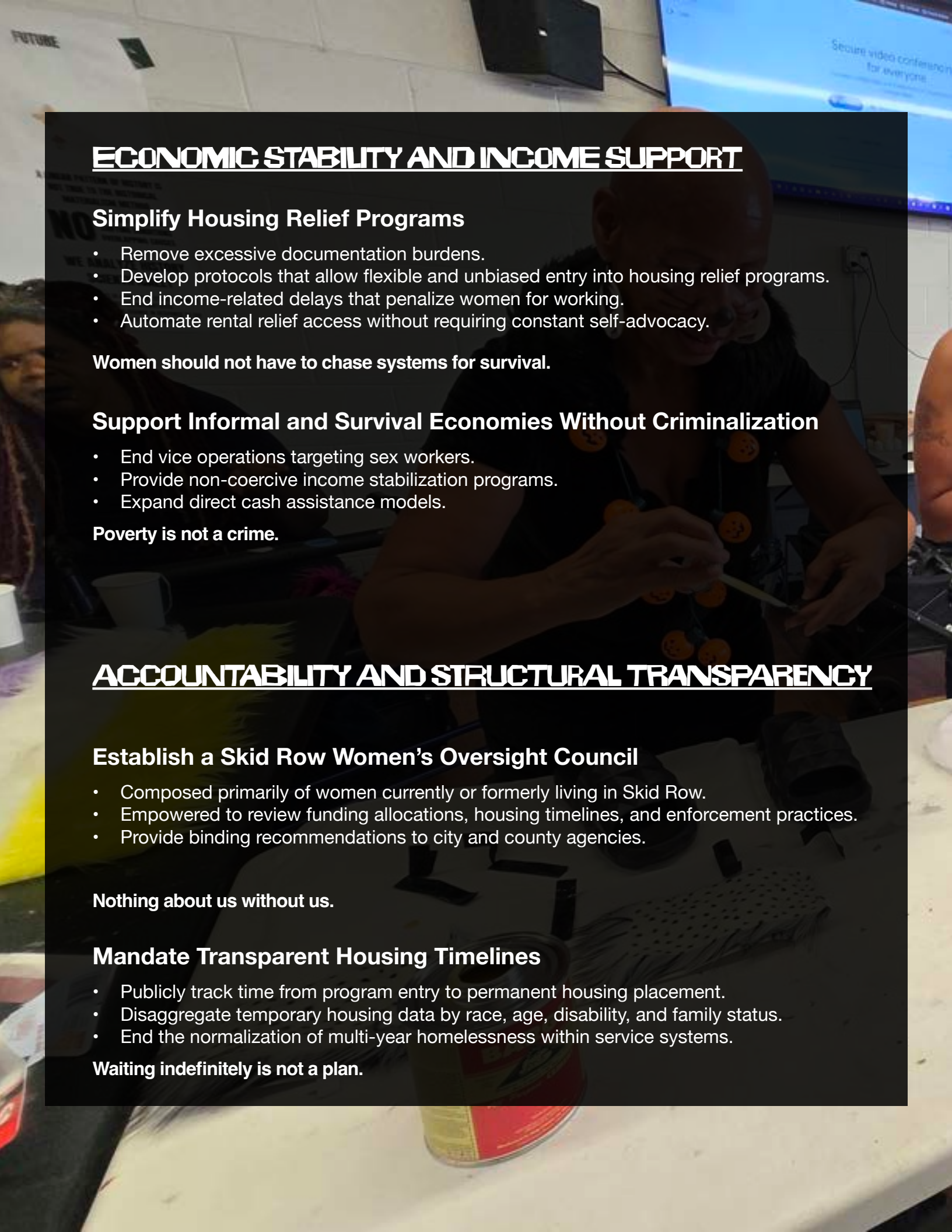
Allowing elderly women to age and die on sidewalks is institutional violence.

TRANS AND GENDER EXPANSIVE JUSTICE

Enforce Anti-Discrimination Protections Across All Shelters and Housing Programs

- Mandate trans-inclusive shelter placements aligned with gender identity.
- Establish accountability mechanisms for staff harassment and discrimination.
- Guarantee safe access to hormone therapy and gender-affirming care.

Gender-based violence cannot be tolerated within institutions funded in the name of care.



ECONOMIC STABILITY AND INCOME SUPPORT

Simplify Housing Relief Programs

- Remove excessive documentation burdens.
- Develop protocols that allow flexible and unbiased entry into housing relief programs.
- End income-related delays that penalize women for working.
- Automate rental relief access without requiring constant self-advocacy.

Women should not have to chase systems for survival.

Support Informal and Survival Economies Without Criminalization

- End vice operations targeting sex workers.
- Provide non-coercive income stabilization programs.
- Expand direct cash assistance models.

Poverty is not a crime.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND STRUCTURAL TRANSPARENCY

Establish a Skid Row Women's Oversight Council

- Composed primarily of women currently or formerly living in Skid Row.
- Empowered to review funding allocations, housing timelines, and enforcement practices.
- Provide binding recommendations to city and county agencies.

Nothing about us without us.

Mandate Transparent Housing Timelines

- Publicly track time from program entry to permanent housing placement.
- Disaggregate temporary housing data by race, age, disability, and family status.
- End the normalization of multi-year homelessness within service systems.

Waiting indefinitely is not a plan.

FOOD, WATER, AND BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Guarantee Access to Nutritious Food and Clean Water

- Expand permanent food infrastructure beyond charity-based distribution.
- Investigate misuse of food contracts and enforce accountability.
- Develop publicly funded nutrition programs designed with community input.
- Install easy-to-find usable water fountains that are available 24/7.

Food insecurity is not incidental—it is policy failure.

Ensure Access to Hygiene Infrastructure

- Provide clean and accessible public restrooms and handwashing across the Skid Row immediately.
- Make menstrual hygiene products available in all public restrooms.

Access to basic hygiene products and spaces should be non-negotiable.

SHELTER OPERATIONS

Shelter operations must meet basic public health and human rights standards, funding mechanisms must reinforce—not undermine—those expectations.

- Establish enforceable minimum standards for cleanliness, safety, food quality, staffing ratios, and grievance procedures across all shelters receiving public funds.
- Require routine, independent inspections and publicly available performance reports.
- Tie funding to compliance with health, safety, and dignity benchmarks, including access to nutritious meals, trauma-informed staff training, and clear accountability mechanisms.
- Prohibit the allocation of public funds to facilities that fail to meet basic standards of humane treatment.
- Develop a community oversight structure that includes current and former shelter residents to monitor operations and recommend corrective action.

The trends across this report are unmistakable, women are not asking for expanded management. They are asking for structural repair. We do not need more data to prove the crisis exists. We need political will to address its root.

Housing is the intervention. Everything else must align with that.

METHODOLOGY / OUR APPROACH

This report is informed by the intimate and powerful stories of women in Skid Row. It is grounded in a Black Feminist theoretical framework that validates the everyday experiences and vulnerabilities of women in Skid Row as a legitimate and rigorous source of knowledge (Collins 2000). This framework recognizes the expertise, rigor, and contributions of women's various modes of storytelling as collective knowledge production, including oral histories, artistic expression, community mapping, and other participatory narrative practices featured throughout the report. These forms of storytelling extend beyond traditional academic methods and reflect community-centered ways of documenting lived experience, resistance, and survival. In applying a Black Feminist framework, we take a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach (CITE) acknowledging Skid Row residents as knowledge producers and researchers throughout the entirety of the research process, from research question ideation to data analysis and the final report write-up. Led by DWAC and in collaboration with Skid Row residents, LA CAN staff, and academic collaborators, data collection and analysis in this report are designed to ensure that DWAC's way of knowing, interpreting, and documenting their own lived experiences remains central to how the data is represented and analyzed throughout this study. The next sections explain in detail the methods we used to uphold this approach.

Data Collection

Over the course of five months, we used a mixed-methods, convergent design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Fetter et al., 2013) to collect quantitative and qualitative data during the Spring and Summer of 2025. This mixed-methods approach examined how quantitative data through surveys documented the pressing needs and challenges of women in Skid Row, while qualitative data through interviews and focus groups examined how these needs and challenges were connected to women's broader life experiences before and during their time in Skid Row. Informed by the lived expertise of women, many of whom are long-time Skid Row residents ourselves, these different modes of data were woven into collective histories authored and interpreted by us, members of DWAC. Organizers who live and work within the same conditions being studied. We were not extracting stories; we were entrusted with them, to honor, protect, and return in ways that uphold women's dignity, authorship, and ongoing leadership over this work. As bearers of truth and testimony, we understood that each survey was more than data—it was memory, grief, wisdom, love and survival spoken aloud. Holding these stories required discipline. We listened without interruption, without softening what was hard, and without centering our own emotions in response to women's pain. Our role was not to rescue, interpret, or dramatize. It was to witness with care and to document with accuracy. Carrying these narratives meant carrying a great responsibility. We were accountable to present women's experiences in a way that honored their clarity and complexity—without infantilizing, without sensationalizing, and without diluting. To collect these stories was to sit with the weight of cumulative violence and still remain steady. We approached this work as community members accountable to one another, understanding that how we recorded and reported these truths would shape how women are seen, understood, believed, and responded to beyond Skid Row.

Surveys

Our survey consisted of six sections: Living in Skid Row, Demographics, Media Technologies in Skid Row, Health & Wellbeing, Housing & Pathways to Houselessness, and Criminalization. In total, the survey took around 20 minutes to complete with respondents.

DWAC members helped determine topics included in the survey, proposing questions, and editing language in the survey. Once a complete draft of the survey was finished, we piloted the draft with DWAC members.

Women were eligible to participate if they: (1) self-identify as a woman or 2SLGBTQIA+; (2) were of ages 18 or older; (3) were fluent in spoken English or Spanish, and (4) resided in the Skid Row neighborhood of Los Angeles. We did not survey women if they were under 18 at the time of the study, did not reside in Skid Row at the time of the study, or did not meet other inclusion requirements.

Individuals were sampled using a clustered, convenience sampling design. First, we selected six locations, identified by DWAC members, that were considered safe spaces and common gathering spots for women in Skid Row. Women were surveyed in these areas, over the course of one day, between 9am and 1pm.

These sites included:

- Hippy Kitchen (821 E 6th Street - 6th / Gladys)
- Refresh spot (544 Towne Ave - 6th / Towne)
- Sidewalk Project (768 Stanford Ave / 7th / Stanford)
- Blue Hollywood Sanctuary (6th / Crocker)
- White House (6th / between Wall & San Pedro)
- DWC (442 San Pedro - Winston / San Pedro)

Interview and Focus Groups

During the Spring and Summer of 2025, 20 semi-structured interviews and 9 focus groups were conducted at LA CAN, focused on major transition events, significant life moments, experiences navigating violence and survival, and women's visions for their personal and Skid Row's futures. Participants were recruited largely through community outreach efforts by DWAC staff and volunteers in neighboring Skid Row intersections, through organized community events for women in Skid Row, and through direct outreach to current DWAC members who currently and/or formerly resided in Skid Row. At the start of each interview, women were asked to consent to the recording and use of the interview to inform this report's analysis. Each interview session was approximately thirty to sixty minutes.

While we conducted interviews with women, 9 focus groups were organized simultaneously to gain a deeper understanding of the interlocking oppressions that shape how women navigate their community and survival (Crenshaw, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Collins, 2019). In recognizing the complexities of the experiences of women in Skid Row, sub-groups were created based on specific experiences and identities that women in the community and in DWAC wanted to examine more deeply. These subgroups—priority groups identified through DWAC experience and history of working in the Skid Row community—include: older women, women involved in sex work, Spanish-speaking women who are migrants, 2SLGBTQIA+ women, trans women, and thematic focus groups addressing experiences of violence against women and interactions with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCSF). With approximately 8 to 12 women in attendance for each focus group, DWAC staff and volunteers facilitated conversations where women were able to share in community. Each focus group session ranged from one and a half to two hours, holding a space for meaningful conversations around the gendered and racialized violence, neglect, and displacement women are constantly vulnerable to in Skid Row. Recognizing the sensitivity around the practice of retelling stories of interpersonal, institutional, and social violence, each focus group and interview session was grounded in care and love to help create a safe space for women to reflect on their experiences. All focus groups were supported by trauma-informed therapists and trained DWAC staff who were on-site to provide emotional support and to guide participants toward available contact lists and resources. For safety and confidentiality, all participants were anonymized, and all identifying markers were removed during transcription and analysis. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded by DWAC members, volunteers, and collaborators.

A hand-drawn map of Skid Row, showing various blocks and streets. The map is drawn on a light-colored paper with black outlines. Some areas are shaded in light pink. The map is pinned to a white background with a green corner tab at the top left.

Mapping Policing in Skid Row

During the summer of 2025, a public records request was made to attain arrest records of arrests made by the Los Angeles Police Department between 2020 and 2025 along the Skid Row corridor. The initial request included arrests from both men and women, but given the focus of this report, only the arrests of women were analyzed to better understand how policing shapes their unique experiences. It is important to note that gender in these records is determined and documented by LAPD and is typically limited to binary categories. As a result, these records may misrepresent or erase the identities of transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse individuals. The arrest records included information such as the date and location of arrest, charges filed, and demographic information recorded by the department. In collaboration with members of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, DWAC staff and members organized a full-day participatory mapping workshop.

During the event, we identified specific intersections where arrests and surveillance were most concentrated based on the arrest records obtained, as well as zones identified as “problem areas” by LAPD surveillance technologies, including Data-Informed Community Focused Policing (DICFP) and its “Neighborhood Engagement Areas,” also known as SARA zones. Using these locations as a starting point, women in Skid Row led a community walk through these intersections and created a collaborative, community-generated map reflecting their lived experiences. In sharing their stories of these areas, women mapped locations where they were vulnerable to routine police stops, harassment, violence, and abuse by law enforcement. The map also identifies “danger zones” where women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, as well as spaces associated with safety, sanitation access, artistic expression, and community culture. Through interviews, video documentation, and photography collected during the community walk, women shared their own narratives of how they navigate and survive the carceral landscape of Skid Row. This participatory mapping process was informed by Black feminist approaches that center the lived experiences, spatial knowledge, and collective wisdom of Black women as rigorous sources of knowledge and analysis. As a result, women in Skid Row were able to document and interpret the spatial realities of policing, violence, care, and survival in their community, producing a counter-map that challenges dominant narratives embedded in official policing and surveillance data.

A hand-drawn heart icon with diagonal lines inside, followed by the word "Skid" in a large, stylized, outlined font. The drawing is on a light-colored paper with a green corner tab at the bottom left.

Skid

Data Analysis

In honoring our commitment to ensuring that women in Skid Row understood and had ownership of the data themselves, DWAC held weekly meetings with its own members, academic researchers, Stop LAPD Spying members, Los Angeles Community Action Network staff, and Skid Row residents interested in data analysis. For five weeks, we led weekly discussions that introduced and unpacked the motivations and methods of data analysis and the types of software used for analysis. By hosting these workshops in Skid Row, we were intentional about making these workshops as accessible as possible to ensure full participation from women, so that they could meaningfully engage and contextualize the data. Topics ranged from defining data itself to procedures for conducting thematic analysis on interviews and what it meant to generate cross-tabulations of surveys. Importantly, we understood that the technology-driven “quick fixes” that often accompany a desire to examine the “data”, yet fail to address underlying systemic issues, would not immediately improve Skid Row residents’ quality of life. Instead, the value of these weekly sessions lay in both building the practical, research and writing capacity skills of women and in providing safe spaces where Skid Row residents, staff members, and academic partners could build trust, a shared language, and mutual learning from each other. Prioritizing accessibility, sustained relationship-building and consistent engagement with DWAC members and Skid Row women were deliberate methodological choices that reflect the intentional integration of community-academic partnerships and further affirm this work as deeply rooted in CBPAR.

Qualitative and quantitative data were integrated by bringing the two databases together for comparison and analysis (Fetters et al., 2013). For the qualitative analysis, we conducted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on interview and focus group transcripts to better understand the daily experiences of Black, Latinx, and other marginalized women with displacement, criminalization, and survival across several intersections that inform their everyday lives. The process began with familiarization with data, generating initial codes and refining them, defining and naming themes, holding consensus and feedback meetings with community members, and coding the full sample. This inductive approach enabled us to identify recurring patterns in how participants described their perceptions without preconceived notions of what might emerge. Six coders applied the codes to the interview transcripts in Dedoose Version 10.0.59.

For quantitative analysis, summary statistics were generated for each survey question using RStudio Version 4.4.1. Additionally, DWAC members proposed cross tabs and subgroups for which further summary statistics were generated. Respondents were subsetting into subgroups of interest to DWAC members and summary statistics of all survey questions were generated for these subgroups. These subgroups included: older women (50+), sex workers, individuals with a disability, individuals who reported poor or fair mental health, individuals who reported poor health, individuals who reported at least one adverse childhood experience, individuals with children, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. All summary statistics were provided to members of the writing team to interpret, contextualize, and integrate quantitative results with qualitative themes. To support the writing team in navigating survey questions, a brief overview of topline findings from the survey was presented to the entire team.

The data sample in our research is a fraction of the larger group sample (n=41). While the experiences discussed in this section focus on transwomen and gender expansive identities, it is critical that readers avoid “othering” trans and gender-expansive people by treating their experiences as separate from, rather than interconnected with, those of cisgender heterosexual women.

ACKNOWLEDGE



This work was shaped by women who entrusted us with their stories of lineage, harm, survival, resistance, and vision. Each interview, survey, focus group, and retreat conversation represents a profound act of courage.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the women of Skid Row who shared their experiences. Your testimony is the foundation of this work. We remain accountable to you.

We recognize the volunteers, community researchers, data analysts, and academic collaborators who supported the mixed-methods design, transcription, coding, and quantitative analysis while honoring community authorship and interpretive authority. The amazing work of the therapists, healers, wellness practitioners, carers, mama's and supporters who held space during meetings, focus groups and interviews, ensuring that women could share safely and voluntarily.

We thank LACAN staff and volunteers for their vital role in making the annual Skid Row Women's Wellness Retreat possible, where over 200 women gathered in collective care and where additional testimonies were offered in private interviews. That retreat was not simply an event; it was a space of restoration, strategy, and truth-telling that shaped this report's direction.

We acknowledge the members of the Downtown Women's Action Coalition (DWAC), for their leadership, facilitation, organizing, analysis and love. We want to intentionally name the people whose labor, leadership, and care made this work possible:

EDGEMENTS



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Lastly, we honor the elders who have fought for decades in Skid Row, the mothers protecting their children under surveillance, the trans women maintaining safety networks, the women who have passed away while waiting for housing, and the ancestors whose migrations and resistance made our survival possible.

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