No. Our Voices Won’t Be Muted.

I am part of The Downtown Women’s Action Coalition (DWAC) at LACAN. DWAC was formed in 2001 to address the lack of emergency services and safety for women in Skid Row - a place developed for men, by men. 18 years later, and with a steady increase of women, the lack of services, facilities and support for women has worsened.

Using our experience as a basis, our main objective is to communicate and secure community informed solutions that meet the unique needs of women and families in Skid Row - housed and unhoused.

One of the most successful ways of doing this is through our Skid Row women’s needs assessment which highlights the ways in which homelessness impacts women’s health, security, well-being, quality and length of life.

We see, year after year, the number of unhoused women rising. We see womens needs going ignored and hear of millions of dollars being secured to address homelessness. This has yet to reach women in any significant way.

Case in point: In the recent $20 million HEAP allocation more money went to jobs for city employees than for women’s services. In the end, a mere $235k was earmarked for trauma beds at the Downtown Women’s Center - approximately 1.2% of the $20m.

In a recent focus group, we discussed some of the highly publicized findings of the homeless count. Responding to a claim that 21,000 people were housed in some form of housing in 2018, we asked a simple question: Do you know anyone that was permanently housed last year? The answer remained the same, “I don’t know anyone that has been housed in the last year.”

Building from our conversation the LA Times editorial board posed the exact same question regarding the 21,000 people supposedly housed. They arrived at the same conclusion and unable to fully assess how many people were truly housed.

We cannot allow inaccurate information about us to go unchallenged, this only serves to diminish the housing crisis and make our suffering less visible. The violence against women and families in Skid Row is not only being ignored, it is being endorsed. The criminalization of unhoused women, particularly in Skid Row is astronomical. Our voices must be heard, our experiences must inform policy and our solutions must be implemented. Get involved, join DWAC.

By Monique Noel