

# lava mae

## taking the first steps: mobile hygiene for the homeless

Love what Lava Mae is doing and think your community could benefit from a service like this? Here are some places to start.

### What's the need?

Research homelessness in your community. *How many? Who are the homeless, what are their demographics? Where are some of the most prominent shelters and service providers? What are the options for someone who wants to take a shower?* This will help you understand the landscape, give you ammo for developing plans, and may even make connections that will help you build a collaborating body.

### Just say hello!

Lava Mae is about dignity and humanity. Get your toes wet, and start meeting some of the homeless members of your community, human to human. Understand your own perceptions of homelessness, and challenge them. The best way to understand the experience of not being able to shower and lacking access to hygiene and sanitation is to ask the homeless themselves.

### Start talking about it.

Identify members of local government involved in the issue of homelessness, and reach out. They might be able to direct you to organizations, individuals, and other agencies that could be interested in collaborating on a project like this. This can lead to a coalition of voices, from across the sectors, whose experience and advice will help you hone in your strategy, develop a plan, and access resources. This is how we started our Advisory Committee.

### Build partnerships.

Not only can leaders in the nonprofit world and local government offer their advice, but they can also help back this project. We are not a 501c3 nonprofit; Lava Mae is a fiscally sponsored project of Tides Center. You might find an organization doing related work that would want to host a project like this, or maybe your city government wants to take over this service. There are also many churches and faith-based groups doing charitable work for the homeless that might have the resources and desire to help bring this to fruition.

### Assemble the Team.

You can try to do this on your own but be prepared for it to be all-consuming. A better way to go would be to find like-minded people (independent individuals or people who are part of an existing organization you could partner with) who can bring the following areas of expertise to the table: marketing/PR, project management, design/build, fundraising, social media.

### What are you driving?

Think about a vehicle. We used a decommissioned municipal public transportation bus, which was donated through connections we made in local government. Repurposing an existing resource, one that is iconic and familiar in San Francisco, and turning it into a vehicle for good in the community, helped create a *story* (thanks to our founder's great marketing/PR skills) that has generated a lot of publicity, attention, and funds. Get creative! You can also use a school bus, RV, or just buy a commercial shower trailer.

### We're here to help!

And we're just starting to figure out the best ways to do that. Reach out to Leah at [leah@lavamae.org](mailto:leah@lavamae.org) with any questions, while we work on an online, information-sharing platform. We believe in open-source, and are happy to share any of our strategizing materials to help you get off the ground. We're also happy to extend the halo effect of the publicity we've been receiving, as advisors and supporters of your project.



delivering dignity one shower at a time

For San Francisco's homeless, a shower could be the first step to a new beginning.

According to the U.N. and the World Health Organization every human being has a right to water and sanitation. Why, then, do so many San Franciscans go without?

Currently there are seven facilities in the city offering showers to the homeless; each with one to two shower stalls at best. That equals 16 showers for the 3,400+ people living on the street.

Those who can't access these facilities end up washing in public sinks, outdoor faucets, or not at all. As a result, they suffer from alienation and preventable diseases like scabies, lice, bed bugs, and staph infection.

*My God, go three days without a shower. Just three days. Pretty soon, you just feel like a worm, a social worm.*

~Don Suiter, a homeless San Franciscan

Lava Mae believes that everyone has the right to be clean. And while we can't solve every problem for the city's homeless, we can solve one. We've designed a new way to give more San Franciscans access to thorough and restorative bathing through our "Shower-Me" mobile units — MUNI buses retro-fitted with two private showers, sinks changing rooms and toilets.



To deliver this service, we're partnering with organizations that are successfully working with the homeless. By being mobile, we reach more people where they are. By partnering with homeless service providers, we leverage their experience with San Francisco's homeless while enhancing their offering with much needed showers and sanitation.

With hygiene comes dignity, and with dignity, opportunity.

Some of San Francisco's homeless are actively looking for work. Others want simply to be safe, clean, and healthy. Regardless of their path, every homeless person deserves the dignity of personal hygiene and a chance to engage with the city they call home, a city in which they often become invisible.

Our goal is to provide 80 showers per day per bus – that's almost 2,000 showers per week.

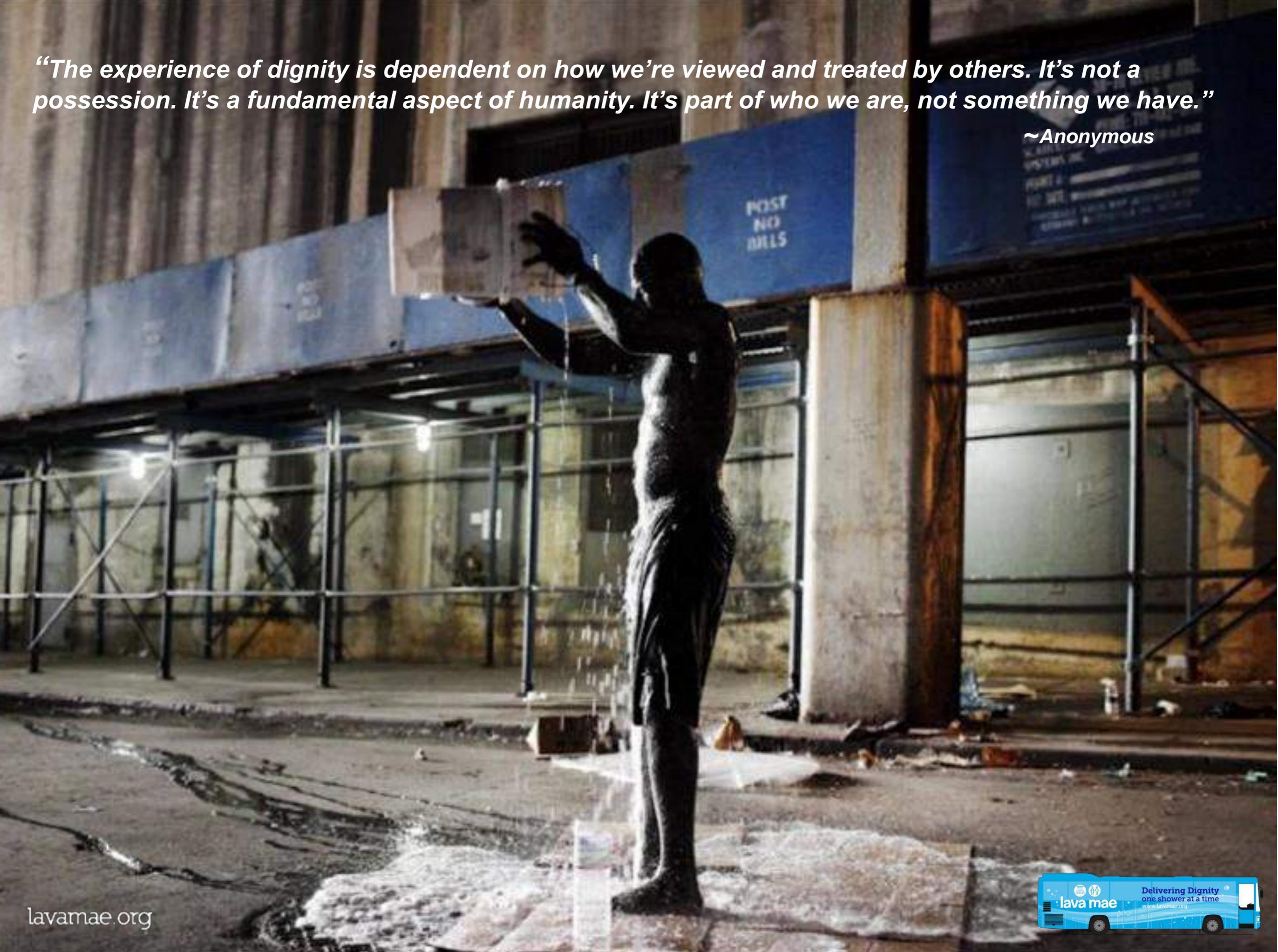
We invite you to join us in bringing Lava Mae to life. Let's give our homeless the fresh start they need, one shower at a time.

# Mobile Showers for the Homeless



*“The experience of dignity is dependent on how we’re viewed and treated by others. It’s not a possession. It’s a fundamental aspect of humanity. It’s part of who we are, not something we have.”*

*~Anonymous*



# What is Lava Mae?

A sustainable mobile shower and sanitation service for the homeless

## Why?

To address the massive shortage of showers / toilets faced by the homeless

## Who is it for?

For the countless men, women, and children who make the streets their home

## The Solution

Increase resources and maximize access



# Driven by our vision

Seed and support mobile hygiene in communities around the globe seeking to serve the needs of people experiencing homelessness

## Mission

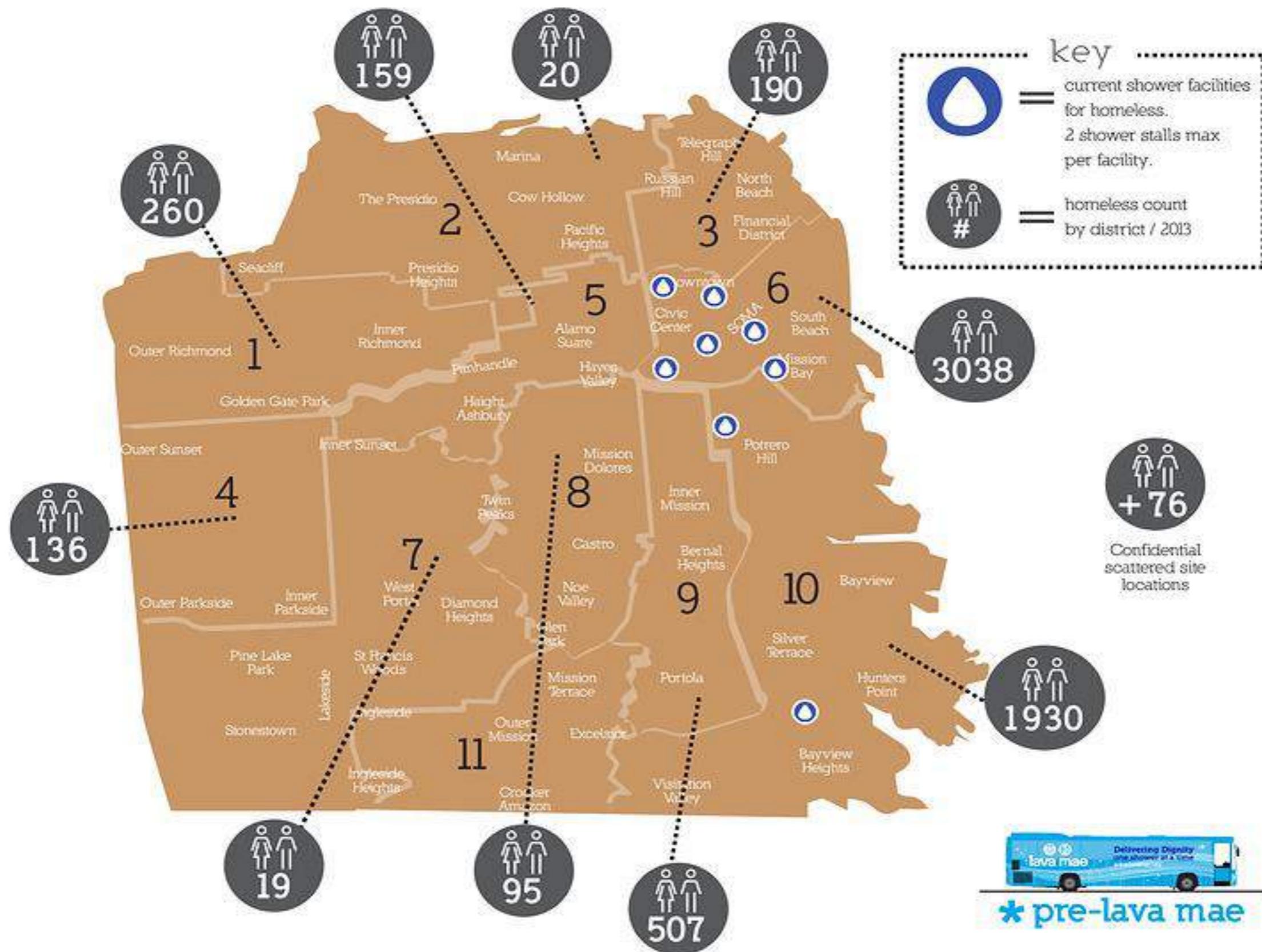
Restore dignity and sow opportunity one shower at a time by providing quality, reliable, and safe access to showers and sanitation for people experiencing homelessness.

## Values

- **INNOVATION:** We're delivering a simple but unique solution
- **COLLABORATION:** Every aspect of our work is rooted in partnership
- **INTEGRITY:** We strive to do what's right: even when it's hard
- **IMPACT:** We're determined to measure and pivot as needed to fulfill our mission / vision



# SF's Homeless Landscape and Shower Facilities\*



# How will it work?



## Partnerships

Collaborating with local government, & nonprofits serving homeless to deliver our service



## Transformation

Retrofitting transportation buses to bring showers and sanitation to the homeless



## Sustainability

Adaptive repurposing of an local icon to ensure our footprint is as small as possible



# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- Filling a huge need
- User-centric design
- Collaboration with the community

## Weaknesses

- Unprecedented model
- Untested team
- Dependence on community partners
- Fiscal sponsorship vs nonprofit organization

## Opportunities

- Restore dignity and ensure human rights
- Create pathway out of homelessness
- Reduce potential health risks for clients and to broader community
- Build upon City's efforts to reduce homelessness

## Threats

- NIMBYism (not in my backyard)
- Drought
- Maintenance costs of old bust
- Challenges re client mental health / drug use



# Strategic Partnerships - Government

**SFMTA**

**San Francisco  
Metropolitan  
Transit Authority**

Donating buses to Lava Mae

**SFPUC**

**San Francisco Public  
Utilities Commission**

Providing access to water (via fire hydrants) and permitting disposal

**SFDPH**

**San Francisco  
Department of  
Public Health**

Granting operational seal of approval re: Lava Mae's health safety



# Key Community Partners

Mayor's  
Office  
of HOPE

Assistance navigating city channels / accessing resources

Project  
Homeless  
Connect

Providing stewardship

MNRC  
Mission  
Neighborhood  
Resource Center

Pilot test partner providing guidance re service delivery

# Our core beliefs...



## Hygiene

Everyone has the right to be clean

## Human Rights

Access to water and sanitation is a basic human right

## Dignity

Reconnecting people with their dignity and humanity is vital

## Opportunity

With hygiene comes dignity; with dignity opportunity



# Timeline

## Phase 1

Proof of Concept  
Spring – Winter 2014

## Phase 2

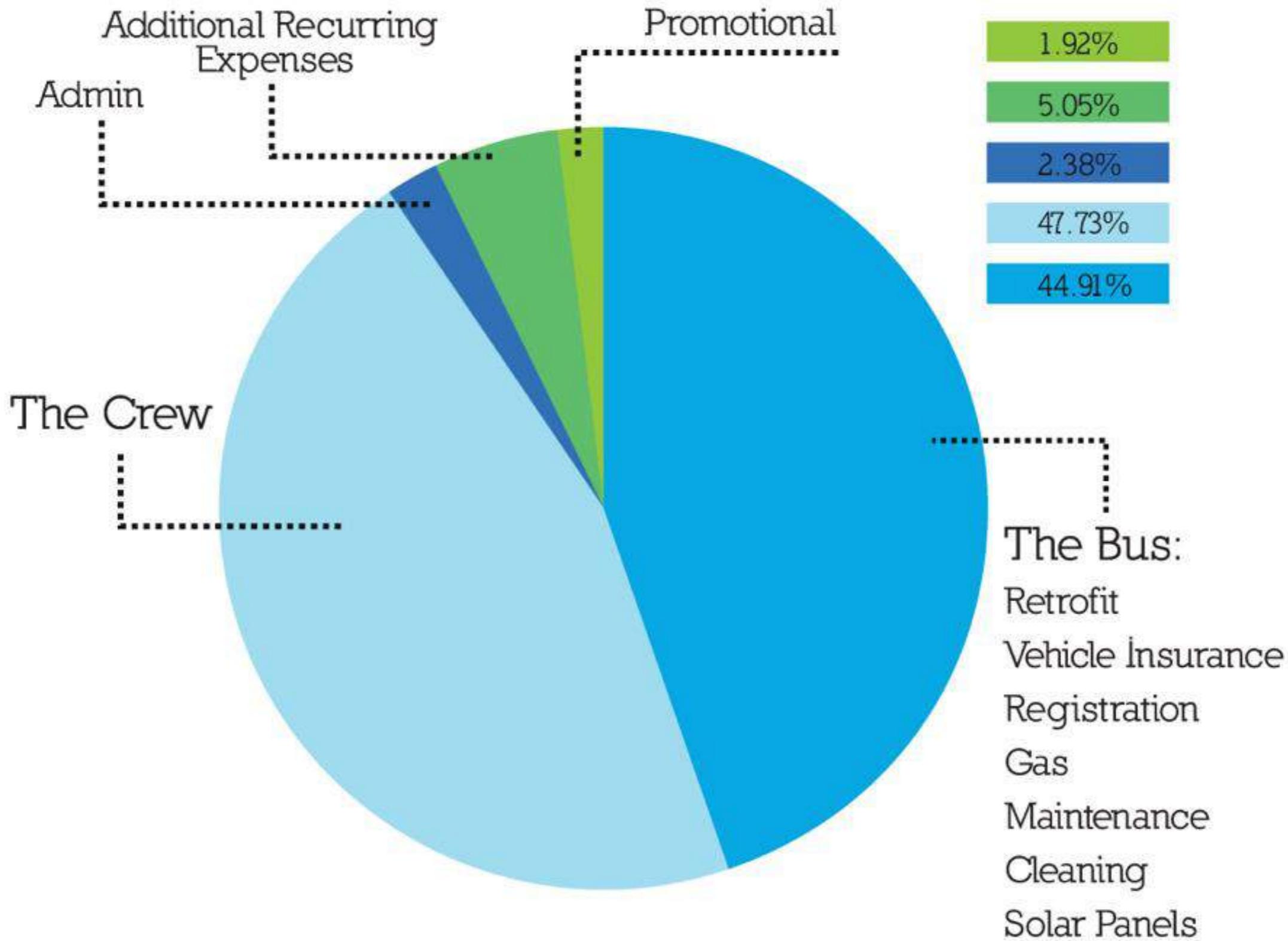
Add 3 additional buses  
Early 2015

## Phase 3

Share Program  
Spring 2015



# Budget Breakdown



# 2014 Funding Goal - \$322,000 (met)

Capital Campaign Bus Retrofit: \$75,000

Program Funding: \$242,000

Corporations:	\$150,000
F-Commerce	\$95,000
Foundations:	\$42,000
In-Kind:	\$25,000
Associations:	\$10,000

# 2015 Funding Goal: \$960,000 (\$800k via major contributions)

Contribution Size	\$ Goal	Number Required	Prospects	Gifts to Date
\$250,000	\$250,000	1	1	
\$100,000	300,000	3	2	
\$50,000	100,000	3	1	
\$25,000	100,000	4	1	
\$10,000	50,000	5	5	

Note: remaining \$160k to be raised via F-Commerce and earned income



# 2015 Fundraising Tools

## Online Fundraising

Direct potential donors to Lava Mae website via email marketing, social marketing, crowdfunding, PR re targeted giving e.g., Help Us Hire the Homeless campaign

## Foundations

Deepen relationship with current family foundations; selectively apply for funding with larger foundations that provide substantial (\$100K/year) multi-year funding

## Corporations

Tap into growing support for homeless causes; leverage relationships in tech community

## Salons

Invite our supporters to hold small events in their homes on our behalf

## F-Commerce

Leverage social media by fundraising directly from Facebook with a Donate App, via AmazonSmile or other third party philanthropic commerce sites

## Earned Income

Launch consulting-for-hire program to seed and support similar programs around the globe

# What's Next?

## Pilot Program

June – December 2014

## Expansion

Q1 2015: begin retrofit of three remaining buses

## Earned Income

Launch fee-for-consulting service and ecommerce efforts



Contact us:

**Lava Mae**  
**3543 18th Street #24**  
**San Francisco, CA 94110**

**[doniece@lavamae.org](mailto:doniece@lavamae.org)**

## How to shower the people with a wave of inspiration

Heather Knight

Updated 2:11 pm, Sunday, July 13, 2014



Silas Borden, who is homeless, emerges with a smile after a shower in the Lava Mae bus in the Mission District. Photo: Brant Ward, San Francisco Chronicle | [Buy this photo](#)



These days, ingenuity and determination are often used for mind-numbingly dumb ventures. Did tech gurus in San Francisco really build an app with the sole purpose of sending texts reading "yo" to their friends? Yes. Yes, they did.

So credit **Doniece Sandoval** with not only having a creative and significant idea, but also turning it into reality - and helping it take off in cities around the world.

We told you last fall that the 52-year-old public relations executive and Western Addition resident had been moved after passing a filthy homeless woman who was crying and saying she'd never be clean. After learning that the city had just 16 showers for its thousands of homeless people, Sandoval had the unlikely idea of turning decommissioned Muni buses into mobile shower stalls.

Last fall, that was about as far as she'd gotten.

But a couple of weeks ago, she held a test run on Capp Street in the Mission and invited us to check it out. And there it was: a Muni bus painted bright blue with "One Shower at a Time" written on the outside and a long hose stretching from the bus to the closest fire hydrant to get water.

[Jose Poot](#), 24, emerged from inside, his long black hair still dripping wet and a smile stretching across his face. Asked how he felt, the homeless man said, "*Bien! Como nuevo.*" Good! Like new.

Asked how she felt, Sandoval sighed, "Exhausted."

"It's a little surreal," she said. "There were times I didn't think it would come together, but there it is. It's amazing."

Her program is called Lava Mae, similar to the Spanish phrase for "wash me" but turned into a girlie-sounding name. The [San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency](#) agreed to give Sandoval four decommissioned Muni buses, and the [Public Utilities Commission](#) agreed to let her hook the buses up to fire hydrants. Sandoval quit her day job and hired a small staff with a total annual budget, mostly from donations, of \$317,000.

But that was just the start. The hardest part, she said, was figuring out who could turn old Muni buses into shower stalls - and who could do it nearby so Sandoval could easily check on the progress. She found Sacramento's Airco, which usually designs mechanical systems for commercial buildings but agreed to retrofit the buses for \$75,000 each.

Other companies offered bus storage at a discounted price, and still others gave free products including towels, sponges, disinfectant, plumbing, bus tires and more. Kohler provided all the bathroom fixtures and installed them, Dr. Bronner's gave \$50,000 and soap, and Google awarded Lava Mae a \$100,000 Impact Challenge Grant.

[Leah Filler](#), community engagement manager for Lava Mae, gives tours of the bus to whoever wants them. And it sure attracts plenty of attention parked on the street.

"It's an idea that resonates," she said. "It's something everyone can relate to. "Issues like homelessness can be divisive across political lines, but what everyone agrees on is how important it is to take a shower and what it must feel like to go without."

Inside, the Muni bus looks like its old self in the very front, still equipped with the driver's seat, steering wheel, controls and "stop requested" sign. But just beyond that is storage for towels,

soap and other supplies. And just past that is the first shower stall, big enough to accommodate people in wheelchairs.

Painted light blue, it includes a showerhead, toilet, sink, mirror, soap dispenser and bath mat. A radio set to 99.7 plays music. An emergency button allows people to summon help - but, amusingly, also sets off the "stop requested" sign.

Entering through the bus' back door lets people who aren't disabled use a second, smaller shower stall. In the back of the bus sits a giant water tank, a fire hose and other equipment.

This bus, named Lava Mae One, will be in operation for a six-month pilot program through December, and Sandoval plans to get her other three on the road as soon as she can raise the money to retrofit them. But even before Lava Mae One was on the road, the idea had caught the attention of do-gooders around the world.

Sandoval said she gets at least one call or e-mail a day asking how to replicate Lava Mae.

"This morning I woke up, and it was a woman in Sydney, Australia," she said.

She's giving a tour to a team from Kuala Lumpur soon, and is working with people in Los Angeles, Atlanta and Honolulu to set up programs there.

"People see the need. People get it," she said. "It's really catching on."

Her idea has sparked discussions by other people about turning decommissioned buses into dental clinics, medical clinics or coin laundries.

And it all started with one woman's idea.

"One person can start a chain reaction," she said. "It doesn't take a tech executive or a billionaire. Any regular person can start this and be completely amazed at what happens."

To donate to Lava Mae, visit <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/LavaMae>.

Lava Mae is seeking bus drivers who will be paid \$30 per shift. E-mail [volunteer@lavamae.org](mailto:volunteer@lavamae.org).

## **Bus stops**

For now, one of the four Lava Mae buses is operating for a six-month pilot program. It is scheduled to make the following weekly appearances through December.

-- **Saturdays:** 7 a.m.-noon at the [Mission Neighborhood Resource Center](#), Capp Street between 16th and 17th streets.

-- **Tuesdays:** 9 a.m.-3 p.m. starting Aug. 5 at Mother Brown's, 2111 Jennings St.

-- **Fridays:** 9 a.m.-noon starting Sept. 1 at Youth with a Mission and Glide, Ellis Street between Jones and Taylor.

-- The bus will also be outside Project Homeless Connect in the [Civic Center](#) starting Aug. 20.

Heather Knight is a [San Francisco Chronicle](#) staff writer and covers City Hall politics. E-mail: [hknight@sfgate.com](mailto:hknight@sfgate.com) Twitter: [@hknight](#)



## San Francisco Nonprofit Converts Old Buses to Mobile Showers for the Homeless

Ralphie Aversa June 25, 2014 1:33 PM [Trending Now](#)

Doniece Sandoval has seen the popularity of food trucks skyrocket over the past few years. It sparked an idea.

"If you can put gourmet food on wheels and take it anywhere, why not showers and toilets?" she asks in a launch video for her nonprofit organization, [Lava Mae](#).

Sandoval's reason for starting Lava Mae was simple: She believes all humans have a right to be clean. Lava Mae's website notes that there are over 6,000 homeless people in San Francisco. About 3,100 of them [live on the streets](#).

After Sandoval came up with her idea to help the homeless, she saw a story about the city replacing old Muni public transportation buses with a new fleet. She immediately sprang into action.

"I want those buses," she thought to herself. "So we reached out to Muni, and we found out that they have a donation program."



Lava Mae Bus

Perhaps then the most difficult part of the project began: fitting the buses for the plumbing necessary to run showers and toilets.

"We brainstormed for a couple months about how this could even be possible in a city like San Francisco, which is so ridden with permitting and regulatory hurdles," architect Brett Terpeluk said. "The biggest challenge, I think, was how to deal with all of the black water which is generated from two showers running every half-hour, 8 hours a day."

Terpeluk and his team devised a plan in which the buses connect to city fire hydrants for the water. Each bus is outfitted with a 50-gallon hot water tank that uses propane. Showers onboard are digitally controlled and supply both hot and cold water.

"Lava Mae is not about ending homelessness," Sandoval says. "What we are about is providing hygiene, because we believe that hygiene brings dignity, and dignity opens up opportunity."

CBS San Francisco reports that the cost to convert an old bus is \$75,000. Lava Mae is kicking off a pilot service this month and hopes to have a full launch with four buses by next spring.

# Identities . Mic

## One Simple Idea Is Helping Give America's Homeless Their Dignity Back



Apart from the inherent hardships and trauma of living on the streets, one of the biggest practical challenge of homelessness is the lack of access to hygiene facilities. In San Francisco, where close to 6,500 adults and 900 minors were estimated to be homeless people in [2013](#), the nonprofit [Lava Mae](#) is hoping to help give these citizens a simple but effective way to feel human again.

Seizing on the idea that even small things can make a discernible difference, the nonprofit is trying a unique approach — outfitting four donated municipal buses with portable shower and bathroom stalls. [Launched](#) last week, the buses, which mean "wash me" in Spanish, are adapted for people with disabilities. Lava Mae estimates that by next year, they'll be able to provide 2,000 showers a week.



"When you're homeless and you're living on the streets, and you're filthy and you're trying to improve your circumstances ... you get disconnected from your sense of humanity," Lava Mae founder Doniece Sandoval, a former marketing executive [told](#) the *Associated Press*. "So a shower, just in and of itself, is amazing."

Inspired by the concept of food trucks, each truck is a mobile bathroom, complete with a [showering pod](#), as well as a toilet, a sink and a space to temporarily store personal belongings. The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency [donated](#) four decommissioned municipal buses to Lava Mae, allowing the organization to tap into fire hydrants. But Lava Mae had to raise the funds to retrofit the buses, which cost of \$75,000 per bus.

That funding comes from a mix of sources. Lava Mae raised \$58,000 from an [Indiegogo campaign](#), as well as contributions from individuals and small private family foundations. Sandoval and her husband also put a significant amount of their own money into the project.

Public spaces, architecture and civic laws are growing [increasingly hostile](#) to the homeless across the country, as cities grapple with a difficult and persistent problem. However, these crackdowns

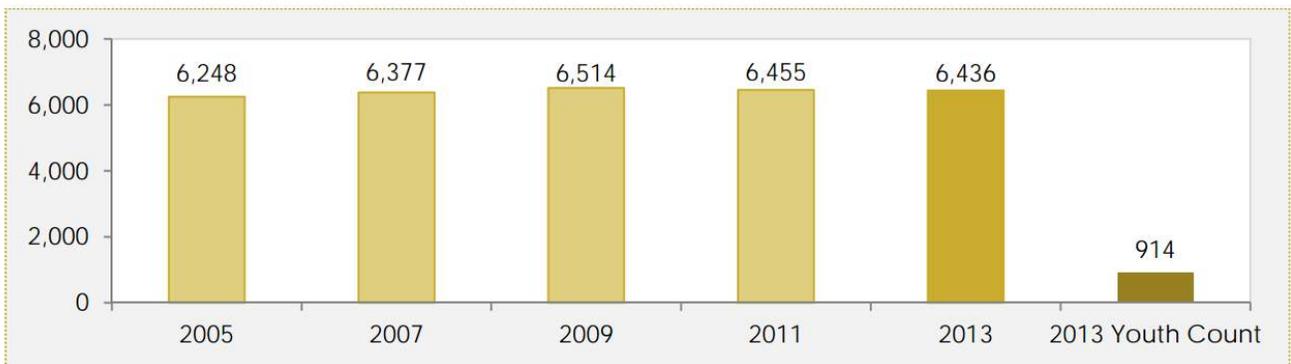
have also spurred a positive movement of sorts, aiding in a surge in initiatives and volunteer groups who are coming up with creative ways to help people.

In April, New York City nonprofit [New York Rescue](#) spearheaded its [Make Them Visible](#) campaign, which aimed to help New Yorkers realize how [indifferent](#) they had become to the omnipresence of the city's homeless. Meanwhile, in June, Vancouver, British Columbia, charity RainCity debuted innovative, [convertible benches](#) designed to provide shelter and sleeping space for the homeless — the exact opposite of the antagonistic ["homeless spikes"](#) seen in cities such as London recently.

In Lava Mae's case as Sandoval points out, showers won't end homelessness.

"That's not the point," Sandoval told [ThinkProgress](#). "What we are about is providing hygiene because we believe that hygiene brings dignity and dignity opens up opportunity."

Figure 1. UNSHELTERED AND SHELTERED POINT-IN-TIME HOMELESS COUNT TREND



Source: Applied Survey Research. (2013). San Francisco Homeless Count.

Image Credit: [City of San Francisco](#)

### [Smriti Sinha](#)



Smriti is a multimedia journalist trained at the Columbia School of Journalism. Before moving to New York, she worked as a sports reporter for The Indian Express in New Delhi. She continues to cover issues in sports, women's and LGBT rights.

## This Bus Is Transforming The Lives Of The Homeless

By [Scott Keyes](#) July 2, 2014 at 1:04 pm Updated: July 2, 2014 at 2:49 pm



Most of us have suffered through the frustration of needing to quickly get ready for work, only to have to wait for a roommate to finish his shower. Now imagine having to share that shower with not one or two other people, but hundreds.

That's precisely the situation facing San Francisco's estimated [6,436](#) homeless residents, who currently have just seven places in the city where they can shower.

Motivated by the belief that everyone has the right to be clean, Doniece Sandoval founded [LavaMae](#), a non-profit with an innovative idea: take old, unused city buses and retrofit them with fully functioning showers for homeless people to use. Last weekend, LavaMae, a play on the Spanish word for "wash me," launched its first mobile bus.

"Our buses were designed in consultation with homeless people," Sandoval told ThinkProgress, a process that has taken over a year.

For example, many homeless women expressed concern for their safety and privacy while showering. As a result, Sandoval and her team designed two individual shower pods in each bus, one of which is accessible for persons with disabilities.

Each pod includes not only a shower, but also a toilet, sink, and a space to temporarily store one's things. Each bus will permit around 30 people to shower on a given day. Once all four buses are running, Sandoval estimates they will be able to provide more than 2,000 showers per week. (See more photos of the buses and interior [here](#).)

"We're mobile because we want to reach people where they are," Sandoval said. In addition, "if we built a brick-and-mortar concept, it would cost a whole lot more."

The city donated four decommissioned municipal buses to LavaMae and allows the organization to tap into fire hydrants, but retrofitting them with shower pods costs \$75,000 per bus.

Funding for the buses comes from a mix of sources. LavaMae raised \$58,000 from an Indiegogo campaign, as well as contributions from individuals and small private family foundations. Sandoval and her husband also put a significant amount of their own money into the project.

LavaMae released a video to coincide with its launch:  
<http://youtu.be/up9TfkcJNxx>

Kara Zordel, Executive Director of Project Homeless Connect, an [innovative program](#) that easily connects homeless people with service providers, had high praise for LavaMae. "This is bigger than showers, this is community change through action," Zordel told ThinkProgress. "Sandoval serves as a role model that inspires me daily. One person can make radical change."

LavaMae plans to use the launch of the first bus as a pilot run in order to test and improve service. Sandoval said she expected that all four buses would be operating by Spring 2015.

Showers won't end homelessness. That's not the point, says Sandoval. "What we are about is providing hygiene, because we believe that hygiene brings dignity and dignity opens up opportunity."



The interior of one of LavaMae's mobile shower buses;  
CREDIT: Kena Frank