

**Criminalization and Homelessness:
“A disaster of human connectivity” – An Interview**
Dreddz B.L. and Kim Jackson

INTRODUCTION

Now into three terms of a deeply conservative neoliberal provincial government and currently being in the midst of a mayoral race, the City of Toronto just declared an emergency on homelessness. What does this mean? Very little – it is a symbolic act that comes in the face of a history of extreme civic neglect and punitive policies against unhoused people. Since well before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the unhoused community and its allies have been enduring and resisting the inadequate and demeaning shelter and affordable housing systems, police violence, the opioid crisis, and deathly low rates of social assistance (Crowe in Cook & Crowe, 2022; Pasternak et al., 2022). With the onset of COVID, anti-poverty organizers pressured the city to stop enforcing anti-camping by-laws so unhoused people could socially distance by living in park encampments and then managed to get the city to open the shelter hotel program. However, these allowances did not come with a practice of ‘care’ or ‘safety’, but were marked by the punitive and carceral mentality that the city has historically demonstrated towards poor people (Cook & Crowe, 2022). In this discussion, the fluid connection between homelessness or houselessness, criminalization, and prison is unpacked revealing the carceral continuum of institutions that contain, control, and create conditions of fast or slower death for the intersectional poor including prisons, shelters, the streets, and social housing.

In this interview, anti-suffering activist, Dreddz talks about the intersections of homelessness and incarceration with long time anti-poverty activist and carceral continuum researcher, Kim Jackson. Dreddz shares his analysis on the illegitimacy and dysfunction of the white “Anglo-Saxon legal system” on these lands and the utter failure of the institutions of social service provision to address the root social, economic, and political causes of poverty. Both the justice and the social services systems work together as vectors of harm to contain, discipline, and abuse poor people who are also disproportionately Indigenous and Black, disabled, queer, non-binary, trans, and female people who have not, for diverse reasons, fit into the wage labour system of colonial capitalism, who may or may not have been charged with a ‘crime’, but all of whom are criminalized regardless.

THE SUFFERING

Kim Jackson (KJ): So, can you talk a little bit about what it means to be an anti-suffering activist?

Dreddz B.L. (DBL): An anti-suffering activist needs to be able to know what the different types of suffering are. And then whether it's a collective of your experience, what you've seen, what you've read, then apply logic to it, apply it to the real world to see where rights have been violated, whether they be human rights, civil rights, things of that nature. It's about trying to do good against all the systems that battle us and trying to get people housed or out of poverty. And this includes the social systems like welfare, not meaning they need to give us more money, but that they need to join the fight against poverty itself. So, when I speak of poverty, it includes prisoners that are fighting for their rights on the inside and outside.

KJ: Who are the people who are suffering?

DBL: The suffering comes from allowing history to repeat itself. People could become impoverished because they were abused or something traumatizing happened to them. They're people who are working so hard to just get by, they're blinded by the economy, providing for themselves instead of seeing that one slip and they're suddenly in the poverty cycle. So, this is why vulnerability to poverty must be a concern before it becomes critical or affects your lifestyle directly. And in some cases, it's too late at the point where it hits. We're talking about the ones that have come from foster care, for example, and if you haven't been adopted, and you haven't learned the cycles of love or certain kinds of responsibility and you're released to a world where society doesn't have the means to deal with you. So, you're just pushed out in the world of consequence, you're getting into trouble, and it's not something that's in your nature, you just haven't had the emotional love. You just want to survive.

KJ: I think a lot about how the colonial-capitalist and the wage-labour systems are not organized to sustain individuals and communities, but to reproduce the profit system, so as soon as we're not contributing to profit production via wage labour, as soon as we become poor, we become

waste, disposable, stigmatized, infantilized, and ultimately disenfranchised (Dennings, 2010; Gidwani & Reddy, 2011). Can you just talk a bit about what “homelessness” is and what it means to be “homeless”?

DBL: To be houseless is to not have a roof over your head. To be homeless means you have a lack of solid people within your life. Most of the homeless are probably socially isolated adults. They’ve come here from other countries and for whatever reason they’re stuck on the street. Some people are running from abuse and don’t know where else to go. And despite the many cases of social isolation there’s nothing concrete to support people even though it’s something that’s going on everywhere and it’s gonna result in depression, of people separating, getting more and more isolated. Because we’re talking about where suffering comes from, often people in this cycle have no adaptability, no education, there’s no counselling processes or things of that nature to deal with the social isolation. It’s just things like, “Oh, do you need a pill for it?”

And that’s just the people elements. We’re not talking about the nature elements where we now need to worry if we have a place to go when it’s windy or cold. Or if it gets too hot and we need a place that’s shady so our skin isn’t roasting all day and then it’s humid all night. You’re gonna need a place to stay that’s sanitary. If it’s getting hot every day, you’re gonna need to be clean every day just for your own health, if you choose to retain that about yourself. There are a lot of situations to being houseless and homeless. There’s quite a heavy collective experience and it’s hard to really summarize to say what it is, but it’s a disaster of human connectivity.

KJ: When people are cast out of the mainstream of society, it’s like living in a parallel reality, there’s a social segregation that happens. Since status quo society tends to project the idea that unhoused and unwaged people aren’t contributing (which of course they are), the unhoused are cast as a social problem. How does this affect people?

DBL: So, it’s where, if you were an engineer, or an artist, or a photographer, you’re literally adjusting to sleeping outside, watching over your shoulder every second you’re not around your tools, your equipment, all those things that count. You’re not doing that work so you can’t show what you do. And because you’ve altered your lifestyle to living on the street, this is now a

consequence to you. The longer you're on the street, the more you might step away from doing photography every day, now you're just like, "Oh! What do I do every day?", and you're entering into drugs or it won't always be drugs, there's people who don't do any, but they've just been driven crazy by the system.

They might become fine eating sandwiches out of the garbage and no one caring that they exist, because they've gotten comfortable in their lifestyle, which is unfortunate. Going long enough without the caring and the love and the right access to services, people are gonna get comfortable in the poverty that they're living in, which doesn't strengthen them as people or help them develop good relationships. It's very painful.

KJ: People haven't just lost a home, they've lost their identity, they've lost hope.

CRIMINALIZATION WITHOUT A "CRIME"

KJ: And what does it mean to be criminalized as a poor or unhoused person?

DBL: That's gonna be a thing too, because "criminal" in the eyes of the Anglo Saxon, white justice community, it means to be labeled as this "bad seed", and that label now sticks with you and it transitions to employment in some cases, towards getting a home. It could prevent you just from having the support structure to get a place to live, for references, and no matter what you did for your neighbourhood, your community, the landlord doesn't like you.

KJ: I appreciate your naming of the justice system as 'Anglo Saxon' and 'white' – it is an illegitimate system on these Lands that was established to secure white settler property rights against Indigenous peoples, and those targeted for labour expropriation and exploitation (Blomley, 2003; Bonds, 2019). It's the legal system which props up colonial-capitalism that creates the condition of poverty to begin with (Gordon, 2006; Manual, 2015; Wacquant, 2009), and this (in)justice system continues to impact peoples' everyday lives of trying to survive.

DBL: When you're criminalized, you're told by the courts to stay away from people with criminal records, but when you socialize out there, so many

people have criminal records for varying things even wrongful accusation of crime. So, it's very hard for someone who has been criminalized even just once and now they've got to socialize with people with no criminal record? It's not a social thing to be like, "Hey, do you have a criminal record? No? Cool, let's go have a beer". These are some of the minor borders that the system ends up putting in. You got to "keep the peace" and be of "good behaviour", but at the same time, we're not responsible if something goes foul from a random situation, like you see a couple arguing and it looks like abuse. You try to step in and do right, but the system has labeled you "criminal", you're under a "criminal" veil, so you become a target even when you still haven't done anything wrong. These are all elements of just keeping things unstable and keeping the "criminal" label going.

I've had this experience since teenage years, which includes the school recommending to the court that I'm capable of a crime, and that got me guilty. It wasn't evidenced. As soon as they see that you don't have the right family supports, the system will begin to corral, get around you, and label you a bad seed. By the time you're 16, you've been kicked out of a bunch of schools. And they're not trying to connect to your parents who are probably working 40 hours and want to spend time with you, but they can't because they're so busy living on the edge trying to pay bills. So, if your parents showed up for you in court, the judge would have let it off, but because you have no one here, they're gonna have to give you probation. So, now you're in an outdoor prison for 18 months. These are the things that keep people tied in criminal.

SHELTERS AND PRISON

KJ: When I was working on the Shelter Video Project, collective members with lived experience of the shelter system compared living in the shelter to being in prison. Comparisons included the punitive nature of shelters: you have to obey a set of rules, you can get kicked out for minor reasons or for false accusations. Also, the food is terrible, residents are infantilized and treated with no respect or regard for their safety, there's a strict daily regimen you have to adhere to. It's just warehousing for the poor. One project participant commented: "with prison there are those walls, with shelters there are no walls, but where are you going to go?" (Jackson et al., forthcoming). Is being homeless a form of imprisonment? How would you compare the shelter system to prison?

DBL: They're almost married. And the police are the ring! So, whereas in the prison system they don't have to call the police because they already have you locked up, but all they do is step on your freedom anyway: you've got to ask for juice, you got to wait for mealtimes, you got to wear clothes that other people were wearing, you don't even get to wear your own used clothes. You get to wear some jumpers and boxers, and nothing is more shameful than having to wear another man's boxers. And they don't care for those kinds of shames. It's almost like, for some guards or shelter staff, it's a joy to put people who you don't think matter in danger because it's not a risk to you.

And then guess what happens when you come out of jail and if you've taken a wrongful accusation you either say screw it, I'll become what they say I am or you keep going about your life, but now you have this anger for this portion of the system. Now, when you get a traffic stop by a cop or anything else, guess what, you're just outright pissed because the last time you interacted with them, honestly, you got consequences. It's all part of the cascade. It's all a part of the business that keeps people down. So, they don't even have counselling services, but you've got to take anger management under a judge dictated program so you didn't even choose to do it. The judge feels you're angry, you show up there, but no one there is honest to themselves: you have to be there so you don't get further charges. But if you've done nothing wrong, what's there to think about other than getting angrier that the system is not for you or it's not working for you? No one understands that you're pissed off and it's beginning to have consequences on your life. There aren't honest circles like that. It's literally by force and that's why none of the programs that they design work – because they're not getting the situation wholeheartedly.

KJ: Similarly in shelters, the staff often don't follow their own rules or they are very arbitrary about it. And if you complain or become frustrated and show emotion you may be service restricted, that is, kicked out, and then it can be incredibly hard to get back into the shelter system.

DBL: In the shelter system, if you get angry about someone stealing your stuff, everybody's quiet. "Hey, can someone review the camera?" Everybody's still quiet? The staff is still not checking the impartial cameras. Some people will hold that anger because those are unsolved issues that

you didn't provoke, you merely asked the right questions and got the wrong result. Now the shelter is gonna call the cops, now you're even more mad, they're calling the cops on you when your stuff is stolen and nobody's helping you to find your stuff or find the person who stole your stuff, so you go right into a fury. But if you've done nothing wrong, what's there to think about other than getting angry that the system isn't for you or that's not working for you. "Oh! I know that dude hangs out at Queen and Bathurst, I'm gonna go there everyday to find him". So now the conflict isn't in the shelter, it's out in the community. You keep pushing out that danger and now you go from homeless to arrested. And that's from you reacting just because you didn't get justice in one place and you've now been injusticed twice. These are the things that feed the wheel.

KJ: Sometimes you also hear that people might try to get into prison to avoid wintering on the streets or to take a break from street life.

DBL: That's now an equivalent, a close comparison between shelters and prison. This is institutionalization. When you're institutionalized you're used to getting everything inside. 10 out of 10 times, if you do something rough enough, the prison system will give you six, eight months. So, the guy you knew from last year that you're waiting to punch in the face, you might wait until September to do it or like, you're gonna go steal and you're not gonna go steal one chicken, you're gonna grab your gym bag and you're gonna clean out the top shelf. Alright, cool, let the prison babysit me for a little bit knowing you'll get released January to April kind of time, do what you want all summer and then knowing it's gonna get cold, you're not going to deal with the shelter fight. The bottom line is that winter's done and I didn't have to get a winter coat, didn't have to go through the struggle of getting clothes, lining up for hot soup. I sat in prison, in the concrete walls and as shitty as it was to put on another men's boxers every day for four months, we got three squares and a cot. If I was outside, I would have been fighting to stay in the Park.¹ When it's time to use the safety of prison you've already timed it within yourself to know when it's time to be rowdy.

This is where the prison and shelter system marry. So, if you're in poverty long enough on the streets, dancing between jail and shelters, that'll be your back and forth. For some people it's forever, for some people it will be temporary. Whether that temporary is 10 years, or just a few, it'll happen.

SYSTEM FAILURE: OR IS IT WORKING AS IT IS SUPPOSED TO?

KJ: I don't think people understand how much work it is being poor and how devastating it is. The institutional or carceral systems that folks have to interface with are Kafkaesque – people's lives are under the control of a nonsensical, unpredictable, impenetrable, and punitive authority that doesn't recognize their humanity. At the same time, this authority dresses itself up in the language of inclusion, respect, and care. It's extremely gaslighting for people in the clutches of these carceral systems.

DBL: People will go to a shelter or a drop-in and submit all their information and then be told by a social worker that you'll get help, even if there's no timeline to it, you're coming for six months, and you're not receiving anything. And it's so common for your worker to get transferred without you being notified and if you've been trying to solve a problem for a year, now everything you've built with the relationship with that worker, if it was a good worker, has all gone to nothing. Your file isn't transferred, so when you get a new worker, you've got to start telling the story over and, in some cases, it might be traumatizing, it might be frustrating. These are all things that can bring up passionate emotion, it's gonna get you angry or depressed, or whatever.

KJ: I know people who have been in the shelter system for eight years and still don't have a proper housing worker while the city of Toronto claims that they're providing wrap around supports for people that follow them as they move from one shelter to the next. And it's simply not true to what people experience and the city just lies about it.² Under the pressure of the closing down of the Novotel shelter hotel program, out of the 260 people living there, only 9 moved to permanent housing (Griffin, 2020). The services they say are there for people, actually just don't exist. It's a kind of torture of dangling housing in front of people.

DBL: None of it is solution based. None of it says: "Hey, go to this place once a week, and we'll start looking towards your housing. We're going to have a counsellor come check on you. So, this means if I can't get a hold of you by phone, I'm going to come to the corner where you hang out", which

means you got to make time for inter-office things and then a little street outreach. But the relevant supports don't exist like that, so if you come out of jail, you hit the street with nowhere to go or even you're in a different town. You're stuck outside, you're homeless – that's part of the wheel or guess what you're in a shelter.

It hurts to try and just function with what's going on. The dysfunction of the system, lack of services, and well-trained staff – all these things are going to contribute to people staying depressed, staying in poverty, and reacting. The system gets people enraged and it just keeps going. No one is doing their jobs, the court officers aren't dealing with their bureaucracy, the landlord's and the tenant boards aren't dealing with the tenant issues, so issues just pile up and anger piles up. In the end, everyone's gonna feel that the police should handle it. These are all things that contribute to the system not being there, not just under educating and misguiding people, but the right love and lessons are just not there. And that's what leads people to end up feeling stuck, to being stuck.

POLICING THE HOMELESS

KJ: Instead of taking up solutions to homelessness the government takes a securitization approach to poor people's communities by increasing policing. Can you talk about how the poor are policed?

DBL: We can go to the COVID time when we were in the encampments and our tents, our homes, were getting bulldozed and police were just there to kick people out of everywhere, even libraries – anywhere you were with bags for too long and anybody with a cell phone called police.³ They came in teams of two, three, 10 to say you weren't supposed to be there.

Then Streets to Homes drove everybody into the shelter. They went around the park encampments for two years and told everybody to go to the shelters, "We'll take care of you, don't worry". With the visual of homelessness in the park gone, there are fewer people asking questions about what we're doing there. There are people convinced that homelessness *is* a choice. "All right, the parks are clear now, the government must have really put in a good program".

And now the police are harassing people in the shelters, telling them to come out and get off the property not that the shelter hotel is closing

down, like at the Novotel and Strathcona. The police are enforcing evictions back onto the street. We watched people get carried out like cheap baggage by cops, like six cops on one young lady. And that was one example that Voices⁴ activists happened to be there and see, but you guys haven't seen the evictions that happened at three in the morning when the cops are just chucking peoples' bags of belongings out and they're on the side of security. Imagine, the cops have just kicked somebody out with four garbage bags worth of stuff and where are they supposed to go? And the shelter staff, the cops don't want them to sit there and get angry? And if they get arrested, are you going to bring those four garbage bags with them? These are all the things that contribute to people getting reactive. And then they say to themselves, "Oh, you know what, I'm going to get pissed right now, or, I got \$5 for drugs in my pocket, I'm gonna smoke it so I can calm down, because I don't want to go to jail".

KJ: These discharges happened after people had been living at these shelter hotels for one to two years, so they had their own rooms with a door that locked and for the first time while in the shelter system they could find some stability and acquire some belongings, and then suddenly they lost everything because of the two-bag rule. They were evicted from their home and expected to stay in a congregate setting. These evictions were enforced by the police, demonstrating that it's their main job to control the poor. This was devastating to witness.

DBL: The police have got to understand that we're people too and if they don't want to grant us our humanity, the people will respond eventually, the people will riot – that's why people lash out. Between the people who are neglected, those just super high on drugs, and the people that are enraged because they've been injusticed, soon there's not going to be enough police to deal with the population if people go mad. Like food prices going up, rent prices going out of control with no rent control on it – like property prices need a cap so people can get the chance to towards some housing.

KJ: When social service agencies get contracts from the city of Toronto, they have to agree to work with the police. And now we have these forms of 'predictive policing' where the police sit at these 'situation tables' with social workers, medical people, and staff from various frontline agencies

where they share information on individuals diagnosed as ‘at risk’ in order to intervene without their consent to bring them into the social work system, which, as this program shows, is increasingly carceral (see Munn, 2019, 2022).

DBL: This is what they should be operating with: if there is a need for five, six, seven, 10 counsellors to help the police, fine, you need additional nurses, that’s what increased budgets should be covering, employing the additional nurses. Instead, the money is given to more police officers for more tasing equipment, bodycams and bullets, right? Not housing, not even a new temporary space to house the mentally unwell because the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is full, which has always been a consistent problem. Just more to police with guns and less for additional care resources to actually deal with what’s happening for individuals.

KJ: It reminds me of the time my neighbour was tased for no reason. “It was a wellness check turned police brutality incident”. As they took him away in the ambulance the medics asked for a police escort in case he acted out. It’s more that these other health care and service professionals help the police to police, instead of reducing the need for police. And of course, it’s a failed response to demand for reform.

CARCERAL CONTINUUM: IT IS AN INDUSTRY

KJ: Housing people, giving adequate health care and food security, providing all of those basic life necessities is cheaper than the costs to incarcerate, shelter, rely on emergency room visits, and food banks (Gaetz, 2012). So, why is it that the powers that be continue to do the most expensive and brutal thing instead of the affordable and caring thing?

DBL: I still say the city is a business where they’re just trying to make sure that all ends of the business turn out for those powers that be. So, for the homeless person who isn’t putting in 40 hours a week, they’ve got to run you through the wringer. So, if they’ve got to get you arrested to let the justice system make a little, leave you in a shelter and let the shelter system, the poverty system make a little. And whatever happens, the jail just must

be full or the shelter has to be full. So, three people come into the shelter, we can kick one out tonight and two more tomorrow. That's all their concern is.

KJ: Because the institutions get paid per prisoner or per shelter bed, or they get a flat rate for service provision from the government. And the cops, judges, social workers, shelter staff, they're all getting paid off of the bodies of poor people getting ground through the system. I hear you saying that poor people are fodder in an industry of the carceral system or carceral continuum, whether it's prison, the shelter system or health care, profit is being made off of poor people's bodies.

DBL: There are more than 10,000 homeless people in Toronto, the system can invest in half of them. At that point, how many of them are going to turn their lives around to put back into the system that's just helped them get back up on their feet? We're going to say 10%. So that's 500 people that the system is counting on to potentially turn their lives around to contribute to the profit system. This means governments not believing in helping poor people; they believe that the answer is to detain, keep you there, rob you of your time and freedom so you can think about what you've done. They've put themselves in a position where they keep trying to wring normalcy out of people.

KJ: So, you're saying that it's more important to the system to have a small number of 'rehabilitated' people re-entering the wage labour system than to provide for the well-being of those who have been cast out of the system altogether? Many theorists have commented that poverty *must* be punitive (Chapman & Withers, 2019) and that the myth of rehabilitation is integral to the ideological underpinnings of capitalism that asserts the wage-labour system of extractive profit is the only way, is a moral good. And we see this with the imbrication of labour and rehabilitation in the prison system (Jackson et al., 2022).

DBL: And they keep building bigger prisons.

KJ: That's right. Ontario Premier Doug Ford considers prisons to be an 'economic stimulus'. And new prisons can be worse than the old prisons that they may replace, such as the Toronto South Detention which has been described in the mainstream media as a "\$1-billion dollar hellhole" (Raizel, 2017).

DBL: It's funny, though, they won't do that with schools. They won't do that with hospitals. But they're sure to rush to do it with the prison system. And everyone with money, they don't want to use it. They can bring it with them when they die. You're supposed to use money to help people, help save the earth. We gotta be able to grow food. Keep the earth clean for as long as possible. Work with people and make everyone feel okay. It's not a utopian society – if we take steps towards improvements then the country will not just be first world in name, it'll actually feel like a first world country, right? For a first world country, things should not be like this, right? Things should not be like this.

KJ: Back to the fact that poverty *must* be punitive and that expanding the social safety net undermines that objective...

DBL: Our 'well being' isn't really *our well being*: it's if they think we're *well enough to be a being*. And it's very sad that it's gotten here. It's something that's seen, and even if you speak to it or about it, it's the equivalent to a company making toxic chemicals, and someone says something about it, but there's no protection for the whistleblower. You become known as a 'troublemaker', someone who stands up for their rights and is looking for justice for the community – the carceral system can't tolerate that. They undermine any kind of agency among their so-called 'client' or 'prisoner' population by punishing those who speak out. You're poor and criminalized, you're guilty, a failure, keep your head low, accept the scraps neoliberalism allows, be grateful and obsequious. That's a key way the system maintains control is by completely discrediting the voices and agency of people that are experiencing the institutional violence of the carceral system.

STREET FAMILY: “WE KEEP US SAFE”

KJ: I want to touch on how people survive and resist all of this carceral violence. I know you do a lot of work in community – you go out regularly to touch base with people on the street, fulfill whatever needs they may have in the moment. Can you talk a little bit about the importance of that work and maybe a bit about the importance of street families, because I'm aware that forming chosen families is important as one of the ways that people survive prison.

DBL: Family is needed and everyone's family will be different. It helps having some kind of connectivity out here, whether you make friends or you have some true friends that came from your previous lifestyle. Those things are the difference between houseless and homeless. You may have no roof, but you'll still have this connectivity to people and still some resources. When you're homeless, that means you're lacking the right family resources, friends, everything to team up and connect yourself back to a stable ground.

There are connections that are made through incidents, like folks might be drinking buddies for a little bit and then one day, something happens, let's say there's a violation, and folks got to stop it together. You find out that you actually have these shared values. When you're talking about outreach and street survival, like when we were sleeping in the tents, it was harder because you always had to have someone you could trust to watch your stuff when you got to go off and do things. Or, one time, there was a situation we had to deal with where a man was running around and exposing himself to closed tents looking for women by themselves. Camp members ended up punching him and when he went to another encampment to do the same thing police were down there. That's an example of some of the kinds of things that we had to deal with. So just in that one incident, we had to deal with protection, we had to deal with a sexual assault issue, we had to deal with a coming together as community issue. When we heard what the guy was doing, we sent a bunch of people over, others watched the camp so they could go get that guy out of the park. And it's like, we had two, three ladies coming up to us that are like, "Hey, yo, this guy is doing shit". They didn't go get police or whatever. So, we felt good in the way that they trusted us enough to feel that we were the safe ones to bring that information of what he was doing in the park. So now we're dealing with gender and safety, and just trying to have a community that's on the sidewalk that's trying to uphold those values.

It's hard to gather together and so when you have it, people want to try and hug it, and keep the good people around. So, when the cops come in, and violate and just bulldoze everything like they did with the parks, it breaks up the community, not the tents, the community of people that hang, the community of people that come there for safety. Once they bulldozed the camps and put us in the shelter hotel for example, at least one person a month that had frequented the camp died. And that's to say, the safe havens

and the safe places we provided, as soon as that got erased, they just left people to scatter to the streets and die. And those are the kinds of situations we get mad about and then we become more of a community. We develop from that. Whether it's an anti-police thing that emerges, whether it's more responsibility of watching who comes into the community, or making sure that there's at least two people in a camped area as in people aren't alone on the street – whatever has to happen, adapting in order to keep people safe.

KJ: It's the communities that know when the individual is suffering and know what they need to move towards safety – as a harm reduction strategy, but so often poor people's communities are seen by social services to have a negative impact on individuals – to be 'unsafe'. For them 'rehabilitation' means leaving your community, the people who actually understand what you're going through and can affirm your experience. Rehabilitation means conforming to a life that you've never had access to or that you've become alienated from – you've fallen through the cracks and that means you don't have a place within the society anymore. The social services that aren't provided, as you say, perpetuate harm by splitting communities instead of centering people with lived experience and supporting them in their community work.

DBL: There was a point when there were maybe 10 people in the camp and in two days it turned into two people. And it was like that for maybe about two months, and then that's when another person came in and we became three people. We had a couple more different people just start coming in and so we must re-establish a new family still with similar rules, but a different kind of vibe. So, the adaptability must be ready to go. Your patience and tolerance must be through the roof because it'll get consistently tested. It'll get tested at three in the morning when you're sleeping. It'll get tested at 3:00pm when you're relaxing or trying to go through the drop-in. There's a lot going on. I still remember tents getting lit on fire, all kinds of stuff like that. I ended up bringing somebody into my tent because they had nowhere to sleep and I knew them, but the next morning I ended up getting pepper sprayed right in my face at my tent door. It was the police and they didn't take anything into account, they just pepper sprayed me and then they realized that I was the wrong person and they took off. Then I'm left trying to deal with that for two, three days. And that was from a mistake. Those

are still things you must deal with on the street. If I had court that day, it would have been that much worse – it would just look like I’m out getting trouble. And police did that to me. It’s ridiculous the things you must deal with on the street. Whether a person sees us and thinks, “Oh, that looks easy, right?” If you try it, it’s like, “Oh, you guys do this all winter? I was only out here for a night”. Whether it’s 3:00am or 3:00pm, it starts to rain, it starts to snow, now you got to get out, knock all the snow off your tent and still try to keep your feet warm. You gotta watch to make sure the police aren’t harassing anyone. You got to watch to make sure people from the neighbourhood aren’t harassing you. As much as you feel you’re established in the neighbourhood, technically you still don’t have an address or rights there. So, all it takes is somebody smoking the wrong thing in the park and somebody catches a glimpse of it, and it’s “Oh! Someone’s smoking crystal in front of my kids”, and then boom! A parent complained about this so now we’ve got to check the whole place for drugs, we think drugs are going on here. Now the whole place gets ransacked and that finishes when it gets dark. So, now you’re in the dark in the heat of summer, trying to avoid the rats getting into your stuff and trying to put everything back into your tent before it gets darker. Or the rain starts when you’re halfway through doing that. So now, instead of putting everything in a nice, neat pile, and here and there, you’re like, “Oh, my God, let me hurry up and dump it in before things get wet”. Right? That’s an elements thing, but when it’s combined with the justice thing, right? It gets challenging.

KJ: And also, the neighbours acting as cops reporting on what goes on in the encampment that has nothing to do with them. This social work theorist named Mimi Kim (2020) calls this the “carceral creep” where it’s not just the police that are policing you, but so is the social worker, the welfare worker and now it’s the gentrifier, the neighbour, and their neighbourhood watch calling the police.

DBL: The neighbours come in many formats. So, we had a movie night and during it a drunk dude just hopped over the fence with a box of doughnuts and started chucking them at us. As soon as we started chasing him, bang, he ran right into the fence and his buddy came right after that, “Oh, what happened? What did you guys do to him? We’re like, buddy, he ran into the fence, you can still see his leg wedged in the fence!” When we brought him

to the hospital, we all said we didn't know what happened to him, being drunk and stupid and all, but he looked at me as messed up as he was and he knew what he did, he had the thanks in his eyes. His buddy could barely carry him. Even after he did all that stupidity of throwing the doughnuts for no reason at us while we were just trying to chill out, we still ended up helping him, so he didn't die on the street.

You still must have a heart amongst the tolerance and the patience, because some people are going to be outright assholes. You must uphold your heart. It's a hard-core maintenance because anything can turn on at any time.

CONCLUSION

In our experience working with unhoused and criminalized peoples, they have consistently stated that those impacted by the carceral continuum need to be centered in struggles against the systems that impact them. As the purpose of the carceral continuum is to directly attack the agency of poor, unhoused people, and prisoners – their economic practices, cultures, and political voice – our movements can seek to respect and support their agency in all these dimensions as a radically oppositional practice. Mutual aid approaches based on material exchange relations, the everyday economic practices of marginalized peoples described above, are the basis of a poor people's struggle. In engaging in such mutual aid, those of us ally accomplices without lived experience gain understanding and awareness from those sharing their knowledge of the system at their own expense – as Dreddz comments – telling their stories over and over as Dreddz is doing here. Poor people are doing the labour of educating and raising awareness of the profound ethical failure of colonial capitalism as writ on their very bodies. Those most impacted by the carceral system are the ones who know what is needed by individuals and communities, and therefore should be foregrounded in projects of social transformation. As those of us who are ally accomplices form relationships as a basis to intervene upon the carceral systems that are impacting unhoused people, we transgress class structures that produce a 'sub-class' of unhoused people, and in this work, come to practice a new way of being (Spade, 2020). Thus, Dreddz's demand for a fulsome social safety net – practiced in community as much as it might be provided by the state based on the agency of the people

who it serves, supported by a redistribution of power and resources that actually demonstrates care for society's members towards a meaningful life of fulfillment (not just punitive warehousing) where everyone's labour is valorized, towards sustainable relations on Indigenous Land – constitutes a radical attack on the neoliberal extractive economy of colonial-capitalism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Erin Dej for editing, providing comments and her support.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ During the first year of the COVID pandemic the city allowed encampments in several Toronto Parks. Dreddz was known as a community leader in the Alexandra Park encampment.
- ² See <https://factchecktoronto.ca/>
- ³ Toronto by-law 608-14 states that there can be no camping in city parks, however, during COVID, the enforcement of this by-law was temporarily suspended in some city parks until the city arranged for social distancing in the shelter system (Cook & Crowe, 2022).
- ⁴ Voices from the Novotel was a solidarity group that organized for shelter residents' rights and against shelter hotel evictions, which after the closing of the Novotel became Voices from the Shelter Hotels.

REFERENCES

- Blomley, Nicholas (2003) "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93(1): 121-141.
- Bonds, Anne (2019) "Race and Ethnicity I: Property, Race, and the Carceral State," *Progress in Human Geography*, Progress Report: 1-10.
- Chapman, Chris & A.J. Withers (2019) *A Violent History of Benevolence: Interlocking Oppression in The Moral Economies of Social Working*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cook, Greg & Cathy Crowe (eds.) (2022) *Displacement City: Fighting for Health and Homes in a Pandemic*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Denning, Michael (2010) "Wageless Life", *New Left Review*, 66: 79-97.
- Gaetz, Stephen (2012) *The Real Cost of Homelessness, Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing?*, Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
- Gidwani, Vinay & Rajyashree N. Reddy (2011) "The Afterlives of "Waste": Notes from India for a Minor History of Capitalist Surplus", *Antipode*, 43(5): 1625-1658.

- Gordon, Todd (2006) *Cops, Crime and Capitalism: The Law-and-Order Agenda in Canada*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Griffin, Tyler (2022) “Winter closing of Toronto shelter hotel causing ‘chaos’ for some, advocates say”, *CBC News* – November 30. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/novotel-shelter-toronto-winter-1.6668959>
- Jackson, Kim, Wendy Bariteau & Billy Cates (2022) “Guerin v. Canada: Exposing the Indentureship of Prison Labour”, *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 31(2): 16-36.
- Jackson, Kim, Sandi Guignard, Asil Lavoie, Lisa LeBlanc, Minutet Nima, Opal Sparks & Marlene Bluebird Stickings (forthcoming) “We Want You to Listen: The Shelter Video Project”, in Jen Rinaldi & Kate Rossiter (eds.), *Population Control: Logics of (De)institutional Violence*, Montreal: McGill University Press.
- Kim, Mimi (2020) “The Carceral Creep: Gender-Based Violence, Race, and the Expansion of the Punitive State, 1973–1983”, *Social Problems*, 67: 251–269.
- Manual, Arthur & Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson (2015) *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call*, Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Munn, Nathan (2022) “‘Terrifying’: Canada’s Police Going All In on ‘Pre-crime’ Intervention”, *The Breach* – July 31. Retrieved from <https://breachmedia.ca/terrifying-canadas-police-going-all-in-on-pre-crime-intervention/>
- Munn, Nathan (2019) “The Future of Canadian Policing Is Turning Teachers Into Cops”, *Vice Magazine* – July 4. Retrieved from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/evywxw/the-future-of-canadian-policing-is-turning-teachers-into-cops>
- Raizel, Robin (2017) “The \$1-Billion Dollar Hell Hole”, *Toronto Life* – February 15. Retrieved from <https://torontolife.com/city/inside-toronto-south-detention-centre-torontos-1-billion-hellhole/>
- Spade, Dean (2020) “Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival”, *Social Text*, 38(1): 131-151.
- Swanson, Jean (2001) *Poor-bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*, Toronto: Between the Lines Press.
- Wacquant, Loïc (2009) *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, Durham: Duke University Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dreddz B.L. identifies as a Jamaican Canadian anti-suffering activist with lived expertise of the shelter system and encampments. He is a beloved community organizer who works with Voices from the Shelter Hotels and the Toronto Union for the Homeless and Underhoused. He is dedicated to fighting for unhoused people’s rights and well-being and for a more inclusive and diverse society. Dreddz has much knowledge to share with the world about the harms of the shelter system, as well as how poor and unhoused people are treated.

Kim Jackson (they/them) identifies as white settler of Scottish ancestry, coming from a mixed class background, having lived experience of poverty and lumpen lifeways, and as queer and non-binary. They are a writer, researcher, community engaged artist, poor people's liberationist, anti-colonial-capitalist, abolitionist, gardener, food enthusiast, winter lover and care-giver working for an enlivened future of possibility.