

Opinion piece

Opposition to homeless criminalisation

Victoria Cooper:

So as we are seeing a rise and the use of criminal laws and civil laws that are used to criminalize homeless people and target rough sleepers, we are also seeing a resistance to these types of strategies that are used against the homeless. In recent years we have seen very successful resistance groups and communities who have been fighting against the implementation of the Public Spaces Protection Orders, the PSPO's and one such example in Hackney, a number of community campaigners there were able to prevent the local authority, were able to exercise their voice to prevent the local authority from implementing PSPO's in the area. And as a result, that's helped other local authorities as well to listen to those critical voices and also it has discouraged them from implementing PSPO's.

So there are some successful resistance movements to these types of measures that are being used against the homeless, however, there are also those resistance movements and homeless action groups that are then met with other types of injunctions and other types of civil orders and criminal laws that are used against their resistance, that are used against the campaign itself, so, for example, in 2015 in Manchester, we saw a number of homeless actions and campaigners that helped to mobilize support for the increase in visibility and increase in numbers in rough sleepers in Manchester. And these action groups often protest deeds and sat in tents within the city centre in Manchester. And as a result, and in order to defuse this protest and this resistance, the City Council took out injunctions in order and then effectively banned people, anybody, from setting up tents within the city centre area.

So these are examples of how homeless action groups and how community campaign groups are resisting those strategies that are criminalizing homeless people, but sometimes these movements are then also met with other civil orders and criminal laws that are used to defuse those protests and campaign groups.