“Scared” is how J-me LaQuet, an Island Transit Operator, describes how the homeless people of Island County feel about living on the streets during the COVID-19 epidemic. “Because of the way they live, their immunities are down and this is scary for them too,” says J-me.

J-me has been driving bus for nine years. During that time, she’s built a reputation for her kindness and outreach to all her passengers, but particularly to those living without a home who are vulnerable. J-me and her fellow bus operators have been working diligently to protect the health and safety of all customers.

“I’m kind of like their mom in that I’m constantly nagging,” she says. “I ask where they’re going and if they need a ride.” With the state’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy initiative, J-me started asking her passengers if their trips are “essential”.

“Our street people understand what’s going on,” she says and adds that they make an effort to stay masked and practice social distancing but do need reminders. “I sense sometimes people look at them like foreigners and aliens from outer space. But each have own story. They are amazing people.”

J-me doesn’t pat herself on the back or want any recognition for being nice, but she does have some advice to share about how to treat people living on the streets. “Talk to them like you would your friend or your neighbor,” she says, adding that whether it’s during a pandemic or not, people living without a home are like the rest of us. “This is a very frustrating situation for them.”

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