

# Nothing About Us Without Us: Building Collective Power among People with Lived Experience to End Homelessness

Presented by:

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Terrence Prayer, Jocelyn Arenas





## Overview

- People who are most intimately impacted by, and therefore closest to the issue, are closest to the solution! They know what will and won't work with their community.

***“Having lived experience of homelessness makes us experts in our own journey, we should never minimize our experience and what we bring to the table, that’s what’s going to continue to change the system!”***

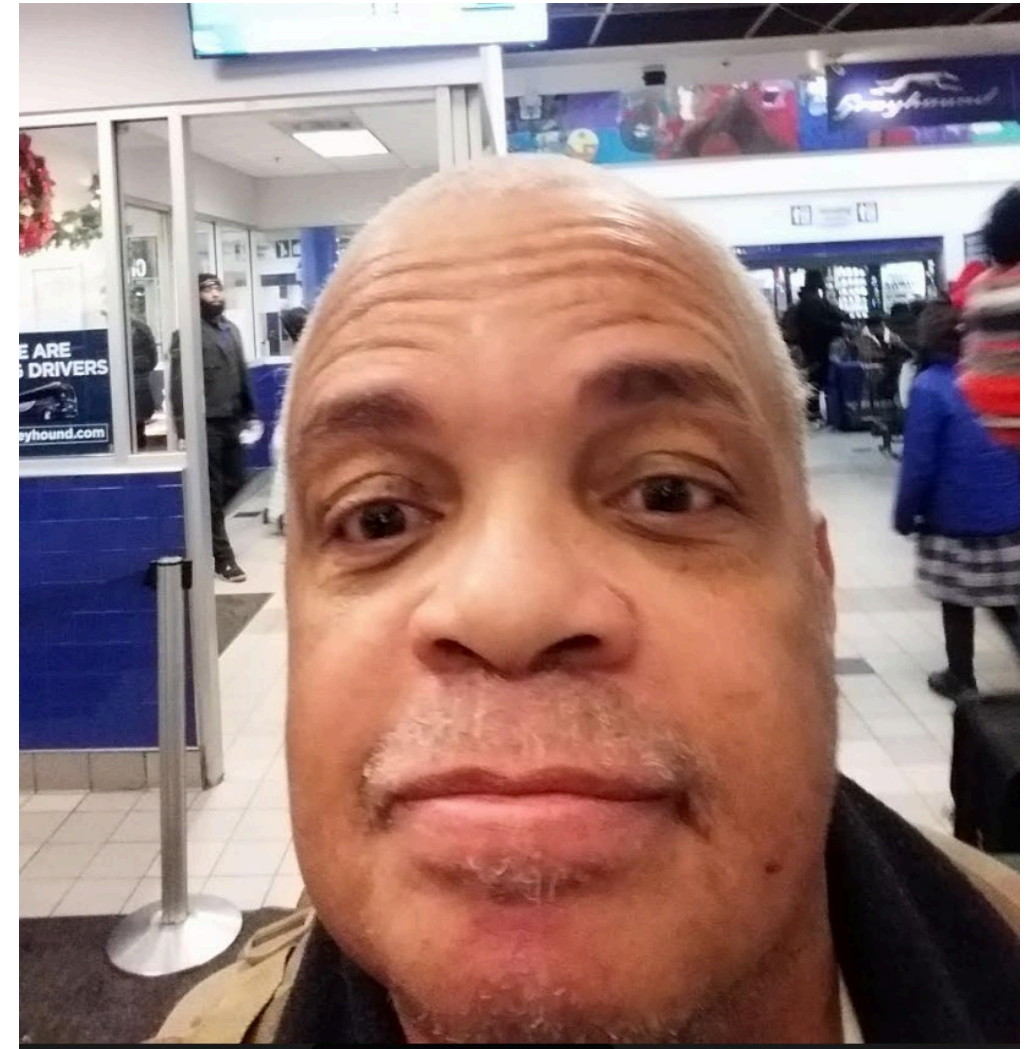
- Partnering with lived experience in developing solutions allow for more **collaborative and innovative** paths forward, particularly when engaging individuals who may typically be considered harder to reach.
- Centering lived experience in data collection and decision making is an essential part of creating a homeless response system that is **empowering** rather than **paternalistic**.



# COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES



Terrence Prayer is a sixty something Army veteran who has recently experienced homelessness after retirement. His experience has brought him to join the Lived Experience Advisory Board in Fresno County, CA. As a veteran, he has utilized resources from both Fresno County and the Veterans Affairs Department. The outcome made a world of difference in his situation and his drive to assist others through the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care is related to how he feels about the passion and efficacy driving those resources. Since he is new to this journey, he is excited to learn and share with others the successes and shortcomings of the systems that we have in place. Hopefully, his experience and input will be in some way another brick in the house we are building to arrest homelessness.





## Terrence Prayer – Fresno CA Lived Experience Advisory Board

- LEAB Start-Up: rural considerations and outreach to those not connected to the CoC.
  
- LEAB Ramp Up and Onboarding to review policies and long documents.
  - Importance of administrative support for LEABs and Feedback Loops
  
- Highlights of FMCoC LEAB work: feedback on funding plans and priorities (HOME-ARP, HUD Special NOFO, HUD CoC NOFO, California HHAP); drafting CoC-wide policies for client feedback and appeals; PIT Count planning and participation.



Dr. Elizabeth Muniz Palomera is a second-year medical student at the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara. She is pursuing a career in Med-Psych with an emphasis on Addiction Medicine. She is the Co-Chair of the Solano County Lived Experience Committee, holds the Healthcare seat for the Solano Continuum of Care Board, and is the Low-Income Representative for the Solano JPA Tripartite Advisory Board. She completed her Peer Mentor training with RCI and has volunteered her time as a peer mentor with Solano County Behavioral Health, a domestic violence advocate, and has participated in many surveys on the quality of homeless services providers in her community. She has also dedicated her time to being a part of the Solano County Rank and Review panel in 2020. Her interests include integrated care, mental health, homelessness, chronic diseases, and issues specific to marginalized communities.

As a first-generation Mexican-American and a person with lived experience, she is passionate about mentoring future generations, educating community providers, and advocating for the voiceless.

"Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny." -  
C.S. Lewis





## Dr. Elizabeth Muniz-Palomera – Housing First Solano Lived Experience Committee

- LEC Outreach and Education: Logo; HOPE Outreach; Community Building
- Informing the HUD CoC Scoring Tool - Assessment of Client Participation in Program Design and Policy-Making
- Participation on Rank and Review Panels for funding decisions (HUD CoC; CA HHAP; etc.)
- Training for providers on *Authentic Engagement of People With Lived Experience*
- From Surviving to Thriving – Peer Mentor/Family Navigato





**JOCELYN ARENAS**  
**SHE/HER**

“I come from a latino family where absence and instability was never lacking. As a youth struggling with absent adults, substance use and housing instability I knew I didn't want that for myself or my children. I didn't want to be just another statistic, another data point in a pool of minorities. In 2020 I decided I wanted to get involved in making systemic change not just for myself and my family but for the families in the community who come from all kinds of struggles. From the schools to the streets, shelters and correctional facilities I'm determined to make as much of an impact as possible. My activism is a badge of armor and it's more powerful than any outsiders opinion of me or my background.”





# Santa Clara County Youth Action Board (YAB)

- Who are we?
- What do we do?
  - YHDP 
  - CSJ 
  - Committees
- Why do we do this?

*“We are the ones closest to the problem so we know best what we need for ourselves.”*

*“It is our goal to create a system where the YAB doesn't have to exist. If the systems worked how they were supposed to our mission wouldn't exist.”*



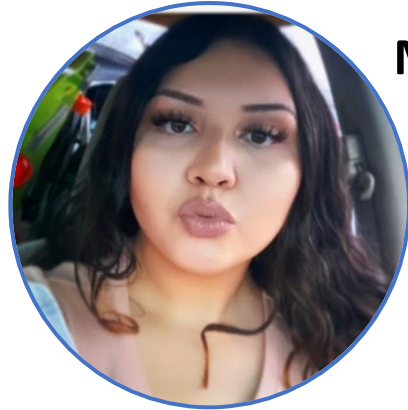


## Meet The Board



**Anastacia Cisneros & Brandon Gonzalez**  
She/Her He/Him

“We have enjoyed volunteering with the YAB so we can see change in our youth facing homelessness and we hope the YAB continues to give resources they need to get them back on their feet”



**Priscilla Yruegas**  
She/Her

“Raised in San Jose, a city of many minorities she was incarcerated at age 18. Since being incarcerated she has been committed to life as a young mom looking to empower and share her stories to others who may be navigating similar experiences.”



**Legend Mull**  
He/Him

“Homeless housing intervention programs lowered barriers to community college for myself. Now I’m a transfer student in UCSC pursuing a double major in business management economics and literature. To me, it’s important that housing programs’ main focus is to help reveal pathways for those without a home who want to learn.”



**Jocelyn Arenas**  
She/Her

“In the past 3 years I’ve been committed to making significant change in my community through self advocacy, organizing and my own personalized activism.”



**Natalie Orozco**  
She/Her

“San Jose Native Natalie, struggled with housing instability at many points in her life which made a big impact in her life After establishing a support system shes been able to re enroll in school, get a job and learn more about being in community.”



**Viviana Arenas**  
She/Her

“Viviana became a YAB member in 2022, she joined the YAB to continue her work in social justice, racial equity, and gender equity. As a community activist she advocates at the local, state and national level. Her community includes youth, girls and women of color, young adults, current/former homeless, young parents, children, and college students.”



**Lilliana Martinez**  
She/Her

“As a member of the Youth Action Board not only do I enjoy doing what we do for those who need it but I’m beyond grateful to be apart of such a wonderful organization. it inspires me to do more for my community, my fellow youth and young people. I’m super thankful to be apart of this experience.”



Dontae Lartigue is the Founder & CEO of Razing the Bar, a CBO that provides mentorship and housing to transition age youth (TAY) in Santa Clara County. Dontae is a former foster youth and dually involved youth who spent his entire adolescence as a system impacted youth. Dontae started Razing the Bar because he believes every youth in care can not only defy the odds but embrace the odds to help them reach their pinnacle. Dontae is also the former Chair of the Lived Experience Advisory Board of Silicon Valley.





## Dontae Lartigue—Razing the Bar, LEAB SV

*“The lived experience movement is continuing to grow but how do we move past it being a trendy buzzword and truly **shift power**? How do we build out organizations that are **led and ran by us**? This **requires strategic organizing, investing, and building** people with lived experience up.”*

Razing the Bar (RTB) is in San Jose, CA and provides comprehensive mentorship and housing support services to current and former foster youth, as well as other under resourced youth populations. The focus on relationships between mentors and the respective youth is our impetus for modifying behaviors, increasing relational networks and sustaining improved outcomes.





# DISCUSSION/Q&A