

Session Title:

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

Session Description:

This workshop will bring together leaders with lived experiences of homelessness to discuss how they have made inroads to have an authentic voice to address and end homelessness. Leaders from the Fresno Lived Experience Advisory Board, Santa Clara Lived Experience Advisory Board, Santa Clara Youth Advisory Board, and Solano Lived Experience Committee will lead an interactive discussion about strengthening the capacity for people with lived expertise to lead collective action to shift individual, organizational and systemic power structures toward a deeper understanding of the causes and solutions to homelessness. This discussion will include a focus on the importance of meaningfully integrating persons with lived experiences of homelessness into discussions about data collection and analysis.

Throughout these three communities, people of color face inequitable impacts and are often served by organizations where they don't see themselves reflected. This group will engage attendees in a conversation on building capacity and what it takes to mobilize people with lived experience to lead. Through highlighting the power of experience, lived experience boards are reclaiming the narrative, having real impact on traditional systems of power, and bringing equity to the forefront of efforts to end homelessness.

This workshop will provide participants with a thought-provoking conversation about how people with lived experiences of homelessness have led change in their communities and how others can tap into their expertise to do the same – from participating on boards and committees to leading their own organizations to collectively create change. The panel will leverage the power of personal storytelling to engage in myth busting and reshape the narrative around homelessness and housing justice and ask attendees to in turn reflect on their stories, experiences, and their own respective roles in shifting narratives and elevating the voices of those most intimately impacted. To facilitate open and honest problem solving, the panel will facilitate small group discussions followed by larger group share outs of lessons learned.

Learning Goals:

- Identify strategies for authentic sharing with persons with lived experience of homelessness.
- Define important considerations for meaningfully integrating persons with lived experience of homelessness into discussion about data collection and analysis.
- Learn about the inequitable impacts of homelessness on the lived experience of persons of color

Speaker Bios:

Dontae Lartigue

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.

Defying the odds allowed him the privilege of becoming a husband, father, and agent of change for his brothers and sisters impacted by systems. Dontae received his B.A. in Psychology from San Jose State and plans to pursue his graduate degree this coming fall. Dontae sits on a host of boards and committees to help guide and impact change in Silicon Valley. As the current chair for the Lived Experienced Advisory Board (LEAB) in his community, his sole purpose is to shift systems power to those with lived experience as he believes folks affected by systems have to be at the center of change. Dontae has faith you all will join him in the “lived experience” movement.

Jocelyn Arenas

She/ Her pronouns, Community Organizer, Santa Clara YAB

Jocelyn Arenas is a young adult that is passionate about what she does and who she works with. She constantly wants to help others and make an impact in the lives of others starting with her community. In the past two years she’s been committed to helping system impacted youth and young parents in Santa Clara County. Part of Jocelyn’s passion comes from her own lived experience of navigating systems and young motherhood.

Elizabeth Muniz-Palomera

Dr. Elizabeth Muniz Palomera is a second-year medical student at the Universidad de Autónoma 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 a 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, is 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 CoC Rank and Review panel. 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 of homelessness, she is passionate about mentoring future generations, educating community providers, and advocating for the voiceless.

Terrence Prayer

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 dept. The outcome made a world of difference in his situation and his drive to assist others through the FM Coc 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.