

Panel: Uplifting What Works

Learn more about our panelists!



Ifalayo Harper

A Po Poet/PovertySkola, LeJay is a powerful voice for the unhoused community of Oakland. Her journey began with a decade of homelessness, triggered by the loss of her job advocating for young women and girls and the subsequent separation from her children. After overcoming substance addiction and a near-fatal overdose, she returned to her community with renewed purpose. As a resident of Homefulness, she actively organizes and inspires others, sharing her story and supporting peers in recovery. She is a fierce advocate against encampment sweeps, highlighting the trauma inflicted on vulnerable populations, and works tirelessly towards sustainable solutions to homelessness. LeJay uses her poetry and writing to articulate her experiences and perspectives, creating a powerful platform for social justice.



John Janosko

John is a key figure associated with Wood Street Commons in Oakland, California, where he lived for 10 years. A long-time resident of the Wood Street homeless encampment, he was also a significant organizer within the community — particularly at what was known as “The Commons.” He helped build and design communal areas, including a kitchen and a free store. Janosko has been vocal about the experiences of those living at Wood Street, especially concerning the city of Oakland’s actions regarding the encampment. He has been involved in efforts to resist displacement and advocate for the rights of the homeless community, emphasizing that Wood Street was more than just an encampment, but a community.



Melissa Moore

Melissa is an advocate, organizer, and community leader whose work transforms lived experience into systems change. After her encampment was swept in 2019, she went on to found RISE — Rising Into Self Empowerment, serve on the board of the Street Medicine Institute, and become a contributing columnist for the East Bay Times. She has partnered with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, presented at national and international symposiums, served on the Continuum of Care, and contributed to the Home Together 2030 plan refresh — all while championing policy reform, community outreach, and know-your-rights education. Her work is grounded in a powerful belief: that people with lived experience are not just valuable voices within our systems — they are essential to reshaping them.

Ray Corona

Ray is a former Youth Advisory Board member and has been involved in the CoC for several years. He has served as co-chair for the CoC Standards, Compliance, and Funding Committee and as a Leadership Board member.



Ms. Shelley Gonzalez - Ms. Shelley Gonzalez is as multidimensional as the work in the many spaces she navigates. Part peer, part practitioner, she is where lived experience meets systems strategy. As an active leader across multiple CoC committees, she is determined to shape governance, policy, and practice — especially at the intersection of homelessness, education, public health, and inequity. She integrates transparency and cheekily calls out inefficiencies, addressing biases in the spaces she serves. Challenging existing practices to provide accessible, inclusive language across CoC spaces, she has collaborated to create solutions that make the system clearer and more navigable for everyone. Outside of the CoC, she is involved with OUSD and in several community and state-level boards and advisory groups.