

Hello my name is Mark Sinclair, I want to mention briefly how I became homeless, I contracted long-term COVID and was hospitalized for 14 months in two different hospitals. I lost my company and house, and was discharged from the hospital to a church warming shelter where I was fortunate enough to move into Alameda's Dignity Village in May of 2023, and I still reside there.

During my stay at Dignity Village I had the pleasure of being elected to the Resident Advisory Board of Dignity Village. I'd like to thank the City of Alameda for providing me with a bathroom, shower and small private place to live. During the 26 months I've been there, I've seen three different nonprofits operating the shelter program. The first was terminated due to unlawful behavior by staff; the second nonprofit did not have the capacity to operate the project; and the third one came in January of 2025. They've made changes, some positive, but we still have some issues. I'd like to list some of the key challenges:

- First of all the RAB has not met with the City of Alameda since last September.
- Nutritious meals: food preparation, quality and availability of food has been a constant problem, especially on weekends.
- Access to basic toiletries and hygiene supplies like toilet paper has been an ongoing issue. We get one roll of toilet paper each, weekly.
- Since August we haven't had wifi/internet access on site. I'm actively looking for a job.

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Dignity Village Resident Advisory Board and HCH Consumer/Community Advisory Board

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- Like I said, the City hasn't met with the RAB since August; the city said if there's an issue we should only fill out grievance forms which will eventually make its way to the city.

I have learned a lot as a resident, a board member, and now a member of the Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Consumer/Community Advisory Board, and I would like to share my input to the County and Supervisor Tam. These are my key messages:

- **Oversight and Accountability:** I strongly urge the County to authorize and carry out a department and staff for shelter and homeless services OVERSIGHT. Regardless of funder, whether county, city, or whoever, there must be funding accountability. Are basic standards - food service for example – adequate and being met? Are residents getting the services and support they need? How are we measuring success?

I'd like to invite the County to our site to visit – drop in and experience breakfast – because the City of Alameda staff haven't been on the property in over two months.

We all contribute hard-earned tax dollars County and cities to provide the basic decent human right to housing.

- **Skilled Service Providers:** We need service provider staff that are well-trained and well supervised, who are compassionate, flexible, and supportive of residents, and who listen to residents.
- **Resident Advisory Boards:** We strongly need elected RAB members in shelter programs. Our RAB is made up of the people who know our needs best – ourselves. Resident advisory boards should be supported and strengthened, because strong resident governance will

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strengthen us all and make this hard work easier for staff and residents.

- **Ongoing Support and Community:** Getting “housing ready” is hard work for staff and shelter residents! We need to support folks in getting their basic life skills learned, with appropriate housing placements, and building community, and moving in help.

At the end of the day, we all need to support our nonprofits, we need to be involved in our communities, and we all need to be able to help people in need, to access the services they need.

As a county or cities, we must ensure that funds are spent responsibly, effectively and accountably. We can and should do better. As a member of the RAB and the CCAB, I expect to keep working towards this goal, long after I am permanently housed on my own.

- Letting lived experience be the guide and co-creating a safe space for conversations to happen; we don't assume we know what is best, rather we co-create solutions with people living it every day.
- Equipping staff with empathetic skills and competencies to foster trust and relationships
 - It's about more than training, it's about heart. Building empathy takes practice. We can do that through role-playing real moments from the streets, sharing what worked and what didn't. It's about listening with patience, giving ourselves an empathy band-aid when needed, and remembering that every interaction matters. A competency framework helps us stay grounded. It outlines what we need to know, the skills to build, and how to show up with compassion for the people in our own community.
- What we have observed as direct service providers on the streets
 - We feel the struggles of those we serve
 - We often question ourselves about doing "enough", because when you see someone who is suffering and you feel powerless to help, it starts to eat at you internally (Vicarious Trauma). It's important to remind each other of the impact we have had, that consistency, presence, advocacy, transparency about systems and compassion have made a difference for those we have connected with and the trust it has built.
 - Our experience of encampment sweeps is that it has created cracks in trust. Telling someone to move across the street for 72 hours is not a solution, we need whole person care. Wrap around services for those in need, I'm talking about housing, food and water, mental health, substance use treatment, documentation, compassionate care that helps people move beyond survival.
 - We have heard and seen how bias in the community has created moral judgments about our unhoused neighbors. In the past two years we have worked to raise bias awareness around unhoused, and justice-impacted community members. Role modeling for community members what it means to be compassionate and curious about our unhoused neighbors stories, so that we can lift the bias that exist in our community that hinders people from making connections. Our community mediators are in the work to put themselves out of work. So that community members can learn and have the skills to de-escalate and connect with their neighbors.
 - What happens when we come together to face our challenges?
 - When we truly see one another beyond the labels, beyond appearances?

- When we choose compassion over fear?
- Thanks we appreciate having this opportunity to be here, hoping we can share this 50 second video with everyone, to show some of the Collaboration that is happening in Oakland to support our Unhoused community members.



Cathy Ralph and Kim Vanderheiden Braided Bridge/Home Bridge Connect
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County Measure W Conversation

1. Building Community
 - a. Not helping people towards independence. Importance of interdependence for surviving, safety, thriving, and freedom. (Kim)
 - b. Community with the unhoused, but also with the housed to help people understand – being a bridge. Bring people on ride-alongs, turn into more help, expands overall community. (Cathy)
 - c. Personal relationships (Kim)
2. Role of the housed in the ecosystem of supporting unhoused voices and experience
 - a. We're followers, facilitators, allow people with lived experience to guide us (Cathy)
 - b. Bringing stability into chaotic, unreliable situations. For example, running a weekly meeting, holding space. (Kim)
 - c. Speak to the council, write letters politicians, administrators, newspaper, anyone who is not seeing what we're seeing and needs to, advocacy (Cathy)
 - d. Importance of witness
3. Standards and Accountability of Service Providers
 - a. As followers, we learn that people have not been treated with accountability and respect.
 - b. Service providers need to hire people with lived experience when possible. Have people with lived experience train people without.
 - c. Retrain staff or replace them if they cannot treat unhoused people well.
 - d. Pay a living wage
 - e. External complaint and abuse process that holds providers accountable.
4. Strong Recommendations for Measure W:
 - a. Funding structure that enables people with lived experience to lead (Cathy)
 - i. Start up fund allows purchase of liability insurance
 - ii. First payroll
 - iii. Startup equipment
 - iv. On time regular payment going forward, not reimbursement, no games with funding.
 - b. Enable communities.
 - i. Cob on Wood
 - ii. Actively feed neighbor support rather than feeding people's fears