



The Role of People With Lived Experience in Strengthening Housing Programs and Systems

Joelle Ballam-Schwan

Director of Programs & Engagement,
Supportive Housing Network of New York

Caitlin Nascher

Asbury Park Tenants Association

Barbara Gonzalez

Chair,
Trenton/Mercer Advisory Board

Will Woods

SHNNY; Care for the Homeless;
Open Hearts

Housing as a Human Right: Access, Stability, & Production

September 23, 2026



The Role of People With Lived Experience in Strengthening Housing Programs and Systems

Barbara Gonzalez

Chair,
Trenton/Mercer Advisory Board

Housing as a Human Right: Access, Stability, & Production

September 23, 2026



The Role of People With Lived Experience in Strengthening Housing Programs and Systems

Caitlin Nascher

Asbury Park Tenants Association

Housing as a Human Right: Access, Stability, & Production

September 23, 2026



The Role of People With Lived Experience in Strengthening Housing Programs and Systems

Will Woods

SHNNY; Care for the
Homeless; Open Hearts

Joelle Ballam-Schwan

Director of Programs &
Engagement, SHNNY

Housing as a Human Right: Access, Stability, & Production

September 23, 2026

THE ROLE OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE IN STRENGTHENING HOUSING PROGRAMS & SYSTEMS

BACKGROUND

- **The Network**

Who we are/what we do

- **Tenant Engagement**

Advocacy, Neighbor of the Year Award

Co-authored op-eds, older adult advisory committee

- **Network Intensive Services**
Roundtables & Memo

90 supportive housing professionals

60 organizations, half NYC, half ROS

Confidential memo to City and State agencies



TENANT ROUNDTABLES & MEMO

- Tenant Advocate Co-Facilitated 5 Roundtables
 - 100+ Tenants
 - 50+ organizations
 - Four geographic regions:
 - NYC (2), Albany, Rochester & Long Island
- **MAJOR KEY THEME:** Tenant Associations key to safety and well-being in supportive housing
- Memo informed policy and programmatic work, including Safety & Well-Being Training Series



TENANT ASSOCIATION TOOLKIT

Goals:

- Surface best practices for creating, sustaining, and utilizing a tenant advisory committee
- Create a toolkit/resource by and for supportive housing tenants
- Build a leadership committee across provider agencies



TOOLKIT ELEMENTS

- What is a Supportive Housing Tenant Association
- How to Create your Tenant Association
- Roles and Shared Leadership
- Set Regular Meetings & Report Back
- Keep People involved
- Setting Realistic Goals
- From Concern to Action
- Working in Partnership with Staff
- Benefits to the Residence, Community & Staff
- Helpful Templates
 - Meeting agendas
 - Guiding Principles
 - More!

WHAT CAN YOUR TENANT ASSOCIATION DO

Good Neighbor Policy

Creation of a good neighbor policy created by tenants to create & sustain community agreements

Weekly Vent + Movie Night

Friday night movie nights with sessions beforehand to vent and air any grievances having with other tenants/neighbors

Volunteer Engagements & Activies

Tenant led/facilitated volunteer activities or building enhancements (plants, painting,)

Community Safety Initiatives

Engagement of the wider community neighboring businesses to push for community safety investments in the neighborhood.

Welcome Committee

Tenant advisory sub-committee to create welcoming events for new tenants or new staff at the building

Advocacy

Partnering with Network and/or other advocacy organization to help facilitate tenant participation in advocacy activities + Active engagement with local elected officials about funding needs for building.

THANK YOU

Follow along at:

Instagram: @theNetworkNY

LinkedIn: Supportive Housing Network of New York

Bluesky: @thenetworkny.bsky.social



Thank you to our Speakers!

Joelle Ballam-Schwan

jballam-schwan@shnny.org

<https://shnny.org/>

Caitlin Nascher

asburyparktenants@gmail.com

Will Woods

will@openheartsinitiative.org

<https://shnny.org/>

Barbara Gonzalez

Chair,

Trenton/Mercer Advisory Board

Housing as a Human Right: Access, Stability, & Production

September 23, 2026