



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR NOMINATION

Amanda S. Chesney, Catholic Charities

- ❖ **Most Important ICH strategic opportunity:** Coordination between single service providers to connect residents to needed resources (i.e. behavioral health) and rapidly exit singles from shelter. Build greater partnerships with employment services and resources to improve resident income and employment outcomes for singles and families experiencing homelessness in the district.
- ❖ **Role in advancing racial equity in ICH and across the District:** We must have difficult and productive conversations within our community of providers and service recipients to ensure we are aware of and addressing any blind spots in our system which perpetuate bias or disadvantage one group over another across our system. We are analyzing our own agency data regarding our workforce, company policies or structures to ensure equity within as well as the data for those we serve to ensure no one is being unintentionally disadvantaged by a process or policy in our programs or service approach.
- ❖ **Two ways to the ICH can work with employment:** Host monthly housing and employment fairs at shelters, facilitate monthly work readiness and entrepreneur workshops for residents experiencing or recently experiencing homelessness at our shelters or elsewhere in the community i.e day centers. These regular events must become a known focus in our community to our residents not a twice a year event. Also, broker a formal agreement with specific employee assistance and job placement entities including a strategic set of goals to achieve. Be bold and take a chance in these goals and hold DOES accountable for their partnership responsibilities with the ICH; we need their assistance to succeed.

Christy Respress, Pathways to Housing DC

- ❖ **Most Important ICH strategic opportunity:** Ending singles homelessness.
- ❖ **Role in advancing racial equity in ICH and across the District:** I'm eager to continue advancing ICH's race equity work- specifically as it impacts our decision making on resource distribution, assessment of needs (our current VI-SPDAT tool is not adequate), and policies related to housing access that disproportionately affect people of color (the unnecessary requirement for mitigation letters for LRSP/locally funded vouchers, credit check requirements on voucher holders, etc.). I'm participating in the ICH Racial Equity & Inclusion Workgroup and am eager to see where our recommendations as a group take us. Pathways' internal work includes centering our Advocacy work on race equity (recent examples include our street homeless voter registration & voting campaign, internal values statement on encampments, focused advocacy on eliminating mitigation letters, and a successful campaign to engage people living on the street in budget and oversight hearings). We are now launching our internal REI Workgroup. We have made updates to our hiring practices such as posting all salaries and are now reviewing our hiring practices- all with a goal to ensure equity. We have a lot of work to do - both internally and externally in the homeless services system to ensure we truly have an equitable society. I am personally committed to this work, as is Pathways to Housing DC as a whole.
- ❖ **Two ways to the ICH can work with employment:** 1.) Conduct in depth surveys, focus groups, and other data gathering to better understand the specific employment desires, goals, and needs of people experiencing homelessness both in shelter and on the street. I hear a lot of conversation about the types of careers/jobs we (gov't and CBOs) think people want/need, but I've heard little directly from the people we serve. I'm eager to move forward with a Peer Certification program (outside of DBH) for people with lived experience of homelessness/incarceration/etc. 2.) Bring the services to the people. I know that we will be adding more employment services onsite with the shelter redesigns for single men, but we shouldn't wait for that to happen to bring the employment programs to the people. Employment providers can & should be embedded in our current shelters at drop-in centers, etc. Unfortunately, even when they are there, many barriers remain. We

need to also work with DOES and our other partners to find creative ways to find employment opportunities for people who are not able to pass a drug screen and for those who are not interested in traditional full time jobs.

Andrea Barnad Barnola, Latin American Youth Center

- ❖ **Most Important ICH strategic opportunity:** After the COVID pandemic, ICH has a challenging but exciting opportunity to help singles and families recover from the losses (personal and financial) caused by the global pandemic in the DC community. One of the most devastating consequences of the pandemic has been the exacerbation of an affordable housing crisis that was already present before 2020 in the DC area. The ICH has the opportunity to develop emergency rental assistance programs, transitional housing, and other community resources to help singles and families meet the most fundamental of their rights: the right to shelter. Moreover, with the rates of COVID cases on the rise, the ICH needs to put efforts towards vaccination campaigns and education, debunking vaccination myths and fears that are keeping vaccination rates low. Only 34.24% of young people under 25 years old have been fully vaccinated in the US. However, many of those vaccinated youth can serve as allies to push the government's vaccination efforts. Groups like the Youth Action Board can serve, outreach, and educate other youth and the overall DC community, bridging the gap between providers and those who they serve.
- ❖ **Role in advancing racial equity in ICH and across the District:** It is not a secret that homelessness prevalence is higher for some members of society. For years, I have witnessed economic disparity affect communities and people of all marginalized origins and ages. In 2019, D.C. had the highest rate of homelessness in the U.S., with an estimated 94 homeless individuals per 10,000 residents. This number corresponds to a predominantly affluent area of a developed country. Then, how do we explain such high numbers in the homeless population? Largely due to systemic and racial inequity combined with significant disparities in home and business ownership amongst the Latino, black and LGBTQ population. I believe that the number of Latino people experiencing homelessness is frequently underestimated (at the yearly PIT count, for example) given common misconceptions of what constitutes homelessness amongst the Latino community. There are other factors that play a role in this issue such as the differential types of community resources and living arrangements chosen by Latinos compared to other DC populations. At LAYC, we put a special focus on outreaching and providing services to that Latino population as well to other marginalized sectors of the community. I believe that my experience working with the young homeless population in DC could contribute to the work of ICH to advance in the matter of race equity and social rights. Moreover, I have a special interest in creating opportunities to close that gap in home and business ownership amongst low-income populations.
- ❖ **Two ways to the ICH can work with employment:** PIT survey data points at lack of employment and income as a primary cause of homelessness (51%). ICH can collaborate with community partners to create strategic employment partnerships/job training programs to hire homeless individuals. In the same way, those partners would benefit from specific psychoeducation to help them manage employees who have suffered negative and traumatic experiences and/or homelessness. In addition to this idea, I believe that there is a need to create more per-diem work opportunities. A few agencies and religious institutions across the country have established work programs in which members of the community can earn a daily wage for helping the agency complete small work tasks. Some of the DC residents I work with might not be able to sustain a long-term job, but they have "good days" in which they can work to earn some money to sustain themselves or their families. These short-term job opportunities can give an individual the motivation and skills they need to grow professionally and eventually move to a long-term job.