



**Tompkins County Re-Entry Housing Summit**  
Thursday, March 3, 2022, 9am-1pm  
Klingenstein Lounge, Phillips Hall (Campus Center), Ithaca College

## ATTENDEES

*Johanna Anderson*; Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS)  
*Liddy Bargar*; Human Services Coalition (HSC)  
*Cynthia Brock*; City of Ithaca Common Council  
*Travis Brooks*; Tompkins County Legislature; Ithaca Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD)  
*Angelina DeBenedet*; Ultimate Re-Entry Opportunity (URO)  
*Henry Granison*; Tompkins County Legislature  
*Danielle Harrington*; Tompkins Community Action (TCAAction)  
*Paula Ioanide*; Ithaca College, Center for Study of Culture, Race and Ethnicity  
*Jessica MacMillan*; The Network  
*Jamila Michener*; Cornell University; Cornell Center for Health Equity  
*Taili Mugambee*; Ultimate Re-Entry Opportunity (URO)  
*Ducson Nguyen*; City of Ithaca Common Council  
*Amanda Norton*; Employee at Gimme Coffee  
*Richard Rivera*; Opportunities, Alternatives & Resources (OAR); Cornell Prison Education Program (CPEP)  
*Haley Romero*; Opportunities, Alternatives & Resources (OAR)  
*Dave Sanders*; Opportunities, Alternatives & Resources (OAR)  
*Temitayo Sanusi Parkinson*; Ultimate Re-Entry Opportunity (URO)  
*Tony Sidle*; Reentry Theater, Civic Ensemble  
*Aiesha Smith*; Resident of Sunflower Houses  
*Samantha Stevenson*; REACH (Respectful, Equitable, Access to Compassionate Healthcare) Medical  
*Alexis Sudilovsky*; Nurse, Department of Social Services  
*John Weiss*; The Network; First Presbyterian Church

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## I. INTRODUCTIONS

### Morning Introductions

*Taili Mugambee*: URO utilizes a collective impact model in our work that engages diverse stakeholders united by a common agenda to humanize those who face systemic barriers to reentry. Our motto is “Humans Humanizing Humans.” The Sunflower Houses program in partnership with OAR and INHS is a prime example of the collective impact approach.

## II. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

*Paula Ioanide*

Based on Qualitative Study by Data and Development Working Group with URO

[Housing Report on Systemic Barriers to Reentry in Tompkins County 2021](#)

For the qualitative study, the team interviewed 54 formerly incarcerated individuals, 18+ currently living in Tompkins County.

### County Information

Although in 2019-2020, Black/African American people made up 3.5% of the county population, 40.7% are in poverty. While Latino/a/x people make up 5.4% of the county's population, 29.9% are in poverty. We see the presence of racial discrimination, stigmatization of individuals in reentry and with mental health issues.

Affordable housing options for people who are low-income, homeless, chronically homeless

- Public housing (IHA)
- INHS Rentals
- Section 8 2168 HCV Vouchers Reliance on private landlords
- Supportive housing units (Amici, Chartwell, Corn St. Magnolia, Lakeview)

Affordable housing options for people in reentry without family support

- St. John's Homeless shelter
- Endeavor or Sunflower Houses
- Homeless encampment "The Jungle"
- Norfe Apartments - accept total emergency needs grant

### KEY THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE STUDY ON HOUSING

1. **Lack of affordable housing options** - "disparity between fair market value and recidivism"
2. **Long wait periods for subsidized or supportive housing units**
  - a. "Long waiting lists for sustainable housing in the area vs not having transportation"
  - b. "Section 8, and STEP programs non priority housing is 12-36 months"
3. **Frustration with DSS regulations**
  - a. "DSS is not being a valuable resource with time restraints"
  - b. "DSS regs and check-ins are not sustainable/'structural barrier'"
4. **Unsafe, unsanitary conditions** - "Unsafe and/or Sanitary Conditions in 'slumlord housing' or shelters" (bed bugs, unsafe with walls falling down, garbage, "drug houses")
5. **Difficulty committing to recovery due to peer influences in available housing** - "Difficulty to recovery due to peer influence in the available housing"

### PARTICIPANTS' PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. Affordable, safe housing options and supportive housing environments for people who do not meet criteria for prioritized populations (e.g. chronic homelessness)
2. Housing grants that match fair market values
3. Accountability for "slumlord" landlords to meet safe, sanitary housing standards



4. Options for drug free and/or housing for people in recovery
5. Being treated with dignity by social service providers

### III. Q&A/OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION

*Richard Rivera:* “Thank you for the presentation, bear in mind, can include the fact that we are dealing with humans, for the individual in a slumlord apt - it’s an existential threat, precarious environment that they cannot move forward. Looking at it through their eyes as they try to get housing to get clean, we are dealing with human beings at all time.”

*Taili:* “REACH is being an org where people felt that they were treated with dignity. REACH started as an equity-based org to address racism. Please feel free to engage and drill down on these issues.” **How do those systems define themselves in relation to human beings?**

*Cynthia Brock:* “Structure issues need to be addressed. Landlords have a responsibility to their tenants, so will look into enforcement. To empower tenants to come forward to have apt up to code.”

*Liddy:* For legislation passed by city council; if closed down for code violations, landlord responsible for relocating tenants: <https://ecode360.com/34158637> . Applies only to city, not entire county

*Cynthia:* What resources do we have? What has changed? **What can we do to make sure people are more aware?**

*Tony Sidle:* the issue of a landlord’s “**right to not renew.**” When someone challenges a landlord for violating code, the landlord can object to making changes. In his experience as a person in re-entry, he has expressed concerns about housing conditions (e.g. mold, flooding, etc.) to his landlord but has been ignored. If he were to advocate for himself in court, there is a risk that the landlord would refuse to renew the lease. In terms of advocating for better living conditions, Tony says that people find themselves in a position where, “you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t”.

*Johanna Anderson:* “safe decent affordable housing is highly regulated housing. Case management, organized, recertification appointments is always a challenge to find people places that are Able.” **Important to help individuals keep paperwork organized and get to appointments**

*Taili:* “People and funding are needed.”

*Cynthia:* When we think about regulation, it can be used both for and against us. When people utilize their vouchers or assistance for housing, in city landlords are supposed to have certificate of occupancy in order to rent. So they should have met building codes and inspections at time of rental. Therefore, if there is a decaying situation, at least you’re starting from a good place before it gets to that. Landlords are technically required to meet certain standards, including an inspection of living spaces every one to two



years to ensure that they are up to certain standards. However, landlords are very behind in meeting with these standards.

*Liddy Bargar:* <https://www.zhewiz.com/fmi/webd/CityOfIthacaBuildingList> - link to check if their units have a certificate of occupancy

*Tony:* **Inspections are very minimal. “Running water, batteries in smoke detectors, basic basic check.”**

### PERSONAL STATEMENTS

*Amanda Norton:* Reads her personal note on her past and reentry personal experience.

- She lived in shelters and hotels, but found that they could be unreliable for safety, and the workers there were disrespectful sometimes. To her, people deserve housing no matter what!
- **Success is an ability to find a way to love myself and others...** appreciation for quality of life. No one can live a battle only in survival mode.
- **The system is not set up to address problems preemptively.** Recidivism is expected. Minimal assistance is provided. The system is unforgiving. People get lost in it all the time. People are not treated with respect. **Burden of so many unreasonable requirements and deadlines for housing, employment, etc.**

*Aiesha Smith:* Personal Experience Statement

- “Need more programs. Would be in the same boat as Amanda and homeless without the Sunflower House.”
- We need more programs for places like Sunflower Houses...DSS is horrible. When leaving prison, you don’t know what’s going on, have a lot to deal with. **Having good housing that solidifies people’s place in the community, treats with dignity and respect, reduces the stress**

*Tony:* Personal Experience Statement

- “We are the lucky ones.” **Just getting housing does not solve every problem. That entire identity I had was now detrimental to my freedom.** It wasn’t just that I need to find a place to live, find a job, stay out of jail... **I had to create a new person.** The Reentry theater program helped me because all the things that got me locked up, is what they focused on.
- The DSS has many issues with the way it runs:
  - To house people at the shelter, DSS pays \$3000 per person each month. However, they only provide \$400 a month in rent for each person. These funds can be reallocated to help people adequately pay rent in Tompkins County.
  - They wait until late in the day to put out the roster of those who will receive housing for the night. If their name is not there, they don’t have a place to stay that night.
  - DSS has the power to refuse money to apartments that don’t meet adequate standards but they don’t do that.
- Interpretations of housing policy are subject to the reader. The people in charge of placing people in housing can choose to help or not, or can even flat out lie because of this policy.

- When it comes to showing apartments, landlords basically give at most two housing options; only one refusal is allowed before the person looking has to go.
- **Lack of enforcement measures for houses** that say they are drug-free or gender-specific, etc.
- “You go to a place for help and it looks like the prison you just left, you’re treated like an inconvenience for wanting basic rights”
- “Everyone deserves a home and deserves to be safe there.” Used Portland Oregon as a template for what is working in housing.

*Jessica:* How do we keep those in “sober living housing” accountable with keeping drugs out of it?

#### IV. OTHER STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

*Paula:* Proposes a question for Liddy Bargar & Danielle Harrington on the requirements for getting into supportive housing, definitions of homelessness/chronic homelessness. Issues around proving homelessness.

##### DEFINITIONS (*Liddy*)

**Homelessness:** a person living in a place not meant for human habitation or in a publicly funded emergency shelter. There are four categories under this definition:

- 1) **Category 1 - Literal homelessness**
  - a) The person lives in a public emergency shelter
  - b) The person lived in a place unfit for human habitation
- 2) **Category 2 - Imminent risk of homelessness**
  - a) Person will be evicted in less than 15 days and has not identified alternative relocation
- 3) **Category 3 - more complex than needed for this discussion**
- 4) **Category 4 - People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence**

There are also subcategories for specific populations that have slightly different classifications. These include:

- Youth
- People in reentry - HUD looks at but does not address directly
- Veterans
- Families

In Ithaca, we have limited resources through HUD and continuum of care - supporting permanent supportive housing programs. HUD is currently funding...chronic homelessness priority. Continuum of care runs coordinated reentry, asks communities to prioritize people entering into permanent supportive housing based on vulnerability based on previous homelessness/current condition. Wherever a person lies, **vulnerability (health, safety) is a priority** for jumping the line to receive housing assistance.

**Chronic homelessness:** a person who has a disabling condition (e.g. PTSD, substance use disorder, mental health disorders, physical or developmental disabilities) and live 12 continuous months on the street/in shelter or have 4 episodes of homelessness over the last 3 years.



If a person is in a prison/jail, the clock sort of stops ticking on amount of time accumulating towards designation of chronic homelessness

### COMMENTS

*Liddy:* Progress is slow, but things are changing (e.g. 2019 tenant protections Cynthia referred to earlier). What hasn't changed in our market yet is the **stock of housing. We don't have enough and what we have isn't safe and healthy for tenants.** People are locked into the silos of their specific regulations.

Housing-first models based on all persons deserve decent, safe, affordable housing AND all persons should have choices about how much or how little case management/other supports they want to take on. No rapid rehousing is associated with supportive housing

Coordinated entry only refers people experiencing homelessness to programs that have some level of supportive services included. One gap is for folks who don't want any support services...**there isn't a system in place that quickly rehouses folks who aren't also interested in those services.** There are a range of experiences and needs that people have.

*Richard:* Need a person who builds relationships with the person to provide **personalized services/address their specific needs.** We have a manageable population of people in reentry and supportive services attached.

*Liddy:* **Some of the programs attached to regulatory funding cannot provide that personalized approach that Richard/Sunflower Houses can.**...need to be more flexible, having advocates that are not bound in the same way as regulations was a success. Progress is tied to regulatory funding, can't do this kind of in-between connection.

*Taili:* barriers to being human with people without regulations...**How do we create a pathway so that folks with lived experience who are employed to be in this service provider network that is able to build those personal relationships?** Centering people with lived experience, equity-focused approaches

*Samantha Stevenson:* The population of people locally that experience homelessness are our (REACH) patients. REACH came out of an equity-focused approach, without mandating certain regulations that other programs do. In the process of hiring 4 internal case managers, because we watched patients deteriorate when they lose housing. REACH's medical outreach team and lead case managers. One of our goals for 2022 is to get into local TC jail and cultivate relationships while they are incarcerated to help them put the pieces together and dignify their process of reentry.

*Cynthia* responds to Samantha's statement- "how can the city help?"

City deals with infrastructure. **Social services are funded by the county.** City has flexibility in managing IURA/HUD program funding. Come at this a more creative way



*David Sanders:* “reiterate what Richard says from case managers stand points, DSS has a high case load and paperwork to keep track of”

- **Case management for people supporting eligible folks for certain programs. Assistance from case management through community-based organizations.**

*Alexis Sudilovsky:* REACH’s casework has been amazing. I’m not the voice of DSS, moving on to other things, but understands the difficult process of navigating the structural issues. **There are individuals within the system who are helpful, but cannot help with the structural issues as well.**

*John Weiss:* **People who could connect institutions with individuals.** Tying pieces of people in...people with specific areas of expertise, connecting with individuals. Hear people’s stories.

**Mental illness is a “curveball”.** Suggestion to have trained psychiatrist to give a course of mental illness first-aid.

*Danielle Harrington:* TCAction has housing programs within the structured system we’re talking about. We also have state regulations we have to follow. **TCA's main vision is to do that the best we can, working within the constraints of regulations while also serving as advocates for individuals at DSS.** Need to be there for the people you are serving.

- **Lack of adequate staff numbers, and having the right staff.**
- Tenant-based mental program: worked to move people into housing with mental assistance. Coordinated entry system: how to get into any of supportive housing programs (chartwell, amici, arthaus, etc.).
- Permanent housing (12-month leases) - TCAction is a program, but also the landlord. Have to be careful of power dynamic. **Focusing on “know your rights” rather than “follow the rules”.**

*Richard:* breaking the silos of organizations and bridging networks.

*Jessica MacMillan:* Psychological first-aid: First a .org - Johns Hopkins University; for children and young people, domestic violence (Future learn.com)

Volunteer drivers for organizations...**bridging these driving services from different organizations to provide a broader and more efficient network of drivers.**

*Amanda:* importance of case managers, individualized attention for people to make them feel like they matter. Level of care, understanding of harm reduction.

## **V. BRAINSTORMING SESSION**

(\*=Votes from summit participants to prioritize these ideas)

Solution-oriented ideations: How do we solve some of the core issues/barriers that have been articulated for people in reentry?

1. **Expanding the affordable housing stock** to 0-30% AMI. This includes providing funding for additional affordable housing stock. Solutions:
  - a. Tax credits - regulated by IRS-regs for 50 years
  - i. Cash vouchers



- ii. Section 8 vouchers required
  - iii. Two Section 8 opportunities in Tompkins County: IHA (directly through HUD) & TCAAction (from NY state) - have received over 100 additional vouchers
- b. Purchasing and renovating vacant/condemned housing with low interest loans from the city.
- c. The Dream: A campus with an emergency center, health providers, addiction treatments, daycare, food pantry, housing, recreational centers, parental skill classes, life skills classes, a home/not a shelter, counseling, behavioral health, support services. \*\*\*\*
- 2. **Human support/case management to navigate systems.** There is a scalable population of 100-200 homeless individuals, with 60-70 people being in reentry. Solutions:
  - a. Code Blue vs. signing up for services \*\*
  - b. Accountability for the shelter \*\*\*\*\*
  - c. Caring, trauma informed providers - training/education needed \*
  - d. REACH: Model for equity based staff training \*\*\*\*\*
  - e. Teaching basic housing, cleaning skills to housing applicants through programs so they won't be denied housing and can maintain their apartments\*
  - f. Humanization vs. a charity case approach\*\*\*\*
- 3. **Public/private partnerships.** For example, the city government legislature, county, grants, funding → have private entities who are much less regulated lead the charge, but get funding from public grants, etc. E.g. Sunflower Houses → INHS bought properties with non-regulated grant from the city, OAR and URO run, URO got process through legislature. Solutions:
  - a. Changing regulation and policy\*
    - i. What is possible in terms of channeling county and state funding for housing first programs?

## VI. NEXT STEPS

- 1. URO will send out a document to collect final ideas
  - 2. URO will structure a strategic plan based on ideas gleaned from this summit and find partners to carry them out
  - 3. Re-read the Housing Report, especially the Housing First portion.
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## SUMMARY ISSUES/OBSTACLES

- How to keep sober housing accountable in a Housing First Model (to not jeopardize other's sobriety)
- Mental illness/wellbeing > being able to acquire a space (assistance with navigating paperwork and programs available) and being able to care for a space (navigating rules, "trash tags", etc.)
- Not knowing the rights of housing (in addition to their being vague legislation/rules that leave it open to interpretation and often in favor of landlords)
- Right to Not Renew Leases (potential retaliation for reporting unsafe/unsuitable living conditions)
- Lack of funding for new/additional programs

## RESOURCES

### Links

- <https://www.lawny.org/topics/3> - **LawNY "Know Your Rights" (Housing)**
- <https://ecode360.com/34158637> - **For legislation passed by city council**; if closed down for code violations, landlord responsible for relocating tenants
- <https://www.zhewiz.com/fmi/webd/CityOfIthacaBuildingList> - link to check if their units have a **certificate of occupancy**
- <https://www.uwtc.org/united-way-2-1-1-alice> - link for **United Way of Tompkins County Alice program** ("A grant of up to \$500 could help your household pay for: Car Insurance & Repairs, Child Care Expenses, Essential Appliances, Health Insurance, Phone & Utility Bills, Rent and/or Other expenses agreed upon by United Way.")
- [https://utilityproject.org/get-help/applying\\_for\\_assistance/](https://utilityproject.org/get-help/applying_for_assistance/) - Link for information on **Applying for Utility Assistance**
- <https://utilityproject.org/useful-links/> - **"Know your Utility Rights"** by the New York's Utility Project
- <https://www.lawny.org/node/69/general-eviction-information-new-york> - link for **general eviction information** for NY residents
- <https://www.cityofithaca.org/168/Trash-Yard-Waste-Collection-Tags#:~:text=Currently%20yard%20waste%20tags%20are,City%20Hall%20for%20%241.50%20each> - **Trash and Waste Resource Page** by the City of Ithaca
- <https://recycletompkins.org/recycling-and-composting/curbside-recycling/> - **Curbside Recycling in Ithaca** by Recycle Ithaca
- <https://acpbenefit.org/> - **Affordable Connectivity Program** (to help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices)
- <https://oei.cornell.edu/recipient/ithaca-housing-hotline/> - Ithaca Housing Hotline ("Providing free legal advice about leases, living conditions, evictions and more")
- <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-for-children-and-young-people> - **Psychological First Aid for Children Free Course**
- <https://www.coursera.org/learn/psychological-first-aid> - **Psychological First Aid Free Course**
- <https://www.urotc.org/healthful-transitions> - **Healthful Transitions (A Program of URO)** provide supportive services in housing, transportation, medical care, employment, mental health resources and food



### **Community Organizations**

- URO - <https://www.urotc.org/>
- INHS - <https://www.ithacanhs.org/>
- OAR of Tompkins County - <https://www.oartompkins.org/>
- TC Action - <https://tcaction.org/>
- REACH - <https://www.reachprojectinc.org/>
- Ithaca Housing Authority - <http://ithacaha.com/>
- Human Services Coalition - <https://hsctc.org/>