



News from the National Consumer Advisory Board

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to this first edition of *The Consumer Voice*, the newsletter of the National Consumer Advisory Board, otherwise known as NCAB.

As a committee of the National Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Council, NCAB is an individual membership group of people with the lived experience of homelessness. We work to empower consumers to improve their health and to end the national plague of homelessness.

I am Rodney Dawkins, and I’m honored to serve as the 2018 NCAB chairperson. As a community health worker in my native Chicago, I’ve personally surmounted the challenges of homelessness. Like my fellow NCAB members, this lived experience of homelessness allows me to effectively advocate for national policies to expand access to health care and affordable housing.

NCAB sprang to life in 2003, the product of a visionary consumer, Ellen Dailey, who tirelessly sought to increase access to health care and housing. Ellen began her advocacy in the Boston area, and broadened it nationally through NCAB. Her legacy continues through an annual award named in her honor and presented at the annual National Health Care for the Homeless Conferences. Ellen truly was a voice for consumers. You can find more information about the Ellen Dailey Award here:

<https://www.nhchc.org/ellen-dailey-consumer-advocate-award/>

We intend for *The Consumer Voice* to serve as the voice of vulnerable persons who struggle daily to overcome the trauma of homelessness. In these pages, we’ll provide interesting information and resources to educate and inform stakeholders of Health Care for the Homeless programs nationwide. In this edition you will find:

- An educational article discussing the link between health care and housing;
- A statement from two members on the value of the National HCH Council;
- A recurring section, known as The CAB Spotlight, which highlights a Consumer Advisory Board (CAB) to show what consumers are doing nationwide.

We hope you enjoy this first edition of *The Consumer Voice*, and that you find it useful, lively, and interesting. We welcome your feedback and contributions, particularly from persons who are experiencing the challenges of homelessness. For more information, feedback, or contributions, please contact our National Consumer Advocate Katherine Cavanaugh at kcavanaugh@nhchc.org

Thanks for reading, and visit us at the NCAB table at the 2018 NHCHC Annual Conference in Minneapolis!



Rodney Dawkins



Valarie Dowell

Education

Housing is Health Care

Today we are experiencing a large crisis of homelessness due to a number of reasons such as lack of low-income housing units, stagnant wages, behavioral health issues, health care costs and medical issues, redevelopment, and income disparities.

We are also seeing an increase in the number of families experiencing homelessness. It is so heartbreaking to see children worry about the safety of their family when they should be playing, laughing, and enjoying life as little people. Instead they are observing how the head of the household is trying to keep the lights on, pay the rent, and make sure the family basic needs are met.

The struggle of losing housing and being homeless can lead to thoughts of giving up, substance abuse issues, depression, and anxiety. Below you will read a story about the intersection of housing and health care, and why it's important to keep talking about it.

A Story of Hope by T. Sukari Finley

Working extremely long hours providing for my son and myself began to affect my mental and physical health. One day I was in so much pain I ended up going to the emergency room and was no longer able to work for a short time. Eventually I became homeless, staying with family and friends. One day I attended a health fair in Los Angeles near Skid Row with various housing and health care providers and learned I qualified for the Housing First Model Program. A Sober Living Facility offered me temporary space until I could find transitional housing. After transitional housing they assisted my move into the Shelter Plus Care Program, and eventually I received a Section 8 voucher.

During this homeless transition I started receiving my health care services at the Los Angeles Christian Health Centers where they invited me to join the Board of Directors and Co-chair the Consumer Advisory Committee. I am so grateful to be involved and a member of the National Consumer Advisory Board which I serve as the Co-chair.

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

Why I Wanted to Work with the Council by Joanne Guarino and Rodney Dawkins

I like their mission statement: how nobody should experience homelessness and that we all deserve health care. Not only have we developed friendships, but we also have learned the importance of policy making. In our work with the Respite Care Providers' Network, the Board of Directors, and NCAB, I have noticed that they all have one thing that separates us from many other organizations. That is compassion. You know we can teach anyone the job, but compassion is something you are born with. When I see people's hearts when they speak, then that's where I want to be. We have enjoyed working with the Council. Rodney is stepping down this year, and I will miss his humor and his caring heart. I will stick around another few more years if they will have me, just to keep on learning with the hope that one day there will be no more homelessness and everyone will have health care!



T. Sukari Finley



Joanne Guarino

CAB Spotlight

This section of The Consumer Voice spotlights the accomplishments of Consumer Advisory Boards nationwide. Please let us know if your CAB spearheads an activity or reaches a special goal, and it can shine in the spotlight!

NCAB's work is facilitated by a 12-member Steering Committee. For this first issue, we focus the spotlight on four National Consumer Advisory Board members so that you can get to know what inspires us to volunteer our time to NCAB. All of our stories stem from our experience of homelessness. You can find more information about the NCAB Steering Committee here, including our individual biographies:

<https://www.nhchc.org/ncab-leaders/>

"When I got hit by the truck, that started me thinking that I needed to change some things in my life!" says Keith Belton. Keith, the NCAB Regional Representative for Regions 5 and 7 (the Midwestern states), says this startling, traumatic event occurred as he was spiraling down a whirlpool of addiction on the streets of his native Chicago. "That's when I hit rock bottom and I knew I had to do things differently to get different results." Keith is seeking re-election for his NCAB Regional Representative position. "Now I help others by serving as an example of someone who can productively recover from trauma," noting that he's a volunteer speaker for the NCAB Trauma-Informed Approaches Learning Laboratory at the 2018 National Health Care for the Homeless Conference.

"My therapy is the photographs and music that I create," says Deidre Young, the NCAB Regional Representative for Regions 6 and 8 (southern and southwestern states). Deidre, who resides in Houston and is running for NCAB Co-chairperson, first took up photography to record events missing from her struggles with short-term memory loss. Deidre demonstrates such creative talent in the graphic arts that she's now recognized as the Official NCAB Photographer. In fact, Deidre is the creative force behind formatting *The Consumer Voice* newsletter. "When you see my photographs here in *The Consumer Voice*, you see how I view the world."

Valarie Dowell is currently the NCAB Peer Advocate who brings a wealth of knowledge and skills about advocacy to the committee. Valarie shares that "stable housing was difficult for me during my homeless experiences due to drugs and incarceration. Only after reaching out and asking for help did I understand that I have a problem with drugs. After treatment I was able to gain steady employment, obtain affordable housing, and reunite with my children." After that, Valarie was hired at Cincinnati Healthcare for the Homeless as the Patient Navigator working with individuals living on the streets to help them obtain medical and behavioral services. "Shortly after I joined the NCAB Steering Committee as the Regional Representative for 5 and 7, I was learning so much about homelessness from other consumers that I went to college and obtained my certification as a Community Health Worker and continued on until I received a Bachelor Degree in Health/Human Services. NCAB has taught me how to believe and invest in myself like I invest in others." My message is "If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk then crawl, but by all means, keep moving." (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)



Keith Belton



Deidre Young



Valarie Dowell



Art Rios, Sr.

Spotlight Continued

“I had been sleeping in a garbage can in Portland, Oregon during my homelessness and addiction days,” says Art Rios, Sr., the NCAB Regional Representative for Regions 9 and 10 (West Coast states plus Hawaii and Alaska). “I found a way to clear it out, clean it up, and make it a safe place to sleep in. I would sneak in at 1 a.m. every morning and sneak out by 6 a.m. Not much sleep. One morning I was spotted by Portland police officer who ran my name and took me into custody on a fictitious paper warrant,” Art explains. “This was the turning point of my road to recovery.” Art, who is running for NCAB chairperson position for 2018-2020, entered a ten-year path of volunteer service to others. This 2015 Ellen Dailey award winner now has a long list of accomplishments—among other things, Art is the current chair of the Central City Concern (“CCC”) Health Service Advisory Council, member of the CCC Board of Directors, and he works with the “A Home for Everyone” Coordinating Board which collaborates with county, city, and state officials as a voice for the community. Art says he is a “Freelance Homeless Advocate.”

To join NCAB as an individual member and learn more about how you can engage (it is free), visit our membership page:

<https://www.nhchc.org/about/membership/individual-members/individual-membership-application/>

**National Health Care
for the Homeless
Council**

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2017 - 2018 NCAB Steering Committee

Rodney Dawkins:	Chair	Regional Representatives	
Derek Winbush:	Co-Chair	Joanne Guarino	1 & 2
T. Sukari Finley:	Co-Chair	David Peery	3 & 4
Valarie Dowell:	Peer Advocate	Deidre Young	6 & 8
Kendall Clark:	Member at Large	Keith Belton	5 & 7
Paul Tunison:	Member at Large	Art Rios Sr.	9 & 10

