

## OPENING REMARKS – Wendy Peterson - NOVEMBER 30, 2018

Before we dive into today's program I'd like to give you a little context.

This is the fifth year for this conference. Each year we've used the convening to bring our silos together to talk about how we can make a difference in the lives of older adults in Alameda County.

Two years ago, we brought Dr. Margo Kushel here to tell us about the new face of homelessness that was emerging... a face that is older and newly homeless.

This year, we're returning to that topic with a broader lens. The housing crisis and its impact on older adults compels us to engage around this issue with a particular focus on the unique needs of older adults.

The housing crisis is a huge and complex set of issues... so much so that we were daunted at the prospect of covering it in a single conference. But as we dug in, and as we worked with the Council on Age-Friendly Community's Housing Crisis Workgroup (which you'll hear more about later)... and as we started to focus on the real people whose lives are impacted, some clarity emerged. And I'd like to share that with you now...

First in the form of the amazing people... the courageous, resourceful and inspiring people who we have met, through a series of interviews in the community.

Asanta Johnson is the mother of five children and has an extensive work history. After injuring her back, she asked her employer for time off to heal, but her request was denied, she was laid off, and wound up living in her car, off and on for three years. Last year she found transitional housing and is focusing on her housing search and her health. But she wonders if she'll be able to survive the wait.

Jerome McIntosh had health problems that led to the loss of his construction job, and the loss of his home. Thanks to St. Mary's Center, he did not spend one night on the street. He has temporary housing and is on seven waiting lists. On two of the lists, he's about number 3,000.

Willie worked in property management. At age 62, he was given a severance package. He diligently looked for work, but the rent for the affordable housing he found was more than his monthly income, and he eventually found himself in debt and couch surfing.

Doris ran a daycare and sold insurance before retiring on a fixed income that didn't keep up with the cost of living. She was displaced four times over five years. Each time, the building was sold... She didn't have enough money for her medication, had to give up her car, and went

to food banks to eat. Eventually, her rent left her with \$23 at the end of each month.

Lynda is the mother of two and worked in the medical field for 41 years, but health issues forced her to resign. She got by on savings but after a few years couldn't afford to keep her home. She feels very fortunate. Five years ago she applied to two affordable housing complexes and was accepted about three months later to the residence where she currently lives.

Lucy has lived in a Section 8 apartment for ten years, absorbing a series of rent increases. She recently had to drop her supplemental Medicare insurance, and she delays going to the doctor. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, she runs out of money for food and basic supplies like toilet paper.

We are honored and thankful that these older adults shared their stories with us. These courageous people represent a few of the many situations that older adults in Alameda County face in the Housing Crisis. As you'll hear today, their numbers are growing. A few of our interview subjects have already had a positive resolution to their crisis. Like Lynda, Doris and Willie applied for and eventually won HUD Section 202 senior housing that guarantees that their rent will be one-third of their income. Asanta and Jerome are stable, but waiting. Lucy is worried.

These profiles represent points on a framework developed by the Older Adult Housing Crisis Workgroup in order to get a handle on the issues, and to formulate action recommendations for the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrator (The Workgroup is part of the collaborative efforts underway under the new county Council for Age-Friendly Communities, which you'll hear more about later).

I'd like to share that framework with you today – "Housing Stress Equals Life Stress" is in your handouts.

It describes the **precipitating factors** that make a person vulnerable – the backdrop of life in the Bay Area where housing costs don't equate with incomes, and inequities abound. The **stressors** that can then hit and destabilize a person – from personal and job loss to health issues to rent gouging and predatory lending. And the resulting impacts.... Being displaced, tenuously housed, and literally homeless...

Older adults often have fewer resources and face more barriers to accessing existing housing services... and as you will hear today, often fall through the cracks because services aren't designed to meet their needs. And seniors are more likely to experience negative health outcomes as a result of stressors and housing loss.

The framework makes clear the importance of finding upstream solutions... and it helps us (all, as collaborative partners) understand the unique needs of seniors so that we can ensure that current and new initiatives address those needs. We used the framework as the backdrop for today's program.

### **Let me give you a brief Overview of the day**

Today, we'll start with our Keynote, with a focus on ending homelessness for older Oaklanders. Then get an overview of the landscape of the housing crisis and the county initiatives and investments that are being launched to address the housing crisis. Next a series of panels will bring perspectives from different silos together to inform us about initiatives and programs underway, and discuss the potential for collaborative solutions and effective interventions. The first panel will address the unique needs of older adults who are homeless. The second panel will move upstream to look at prevention of displacement and homelessness.

After the keynote and the two panels we'll have time for audience Q & A. This year we'll be using roving mics to take questions... but I recommend that as you think of questions, jot them down so that you can be succinct.

After the plenary we'll move to the collaborative heart of the day: small group conversations over lunch in the Discussion Café, that will capture your ideas and insights and spark collaborative opportunities.

We're not going to solve this in a day. But by coming together in the same room and using this day to learn about the work that is underway, to build a common understanding, and to explore collaborative solutions... we will come away better prepared to move forward to improve health and life outcomes for older people in our county.