

HOMeward



If we don't talk about race, why are we here?

Chief Strategy Officer Keiren Havens (left) sits down with Board leaders Chelsea N. Arthur, MS (middle) and Cheryl Matricciani, CPA, Esq. to discuss representation, racial equity and their hope for the work ahead.

Keiren: Cheryl, you're the immediate past Board chair and now Governance committee chair. Chelsea, you're serving your first year as Board chair. Why did you choose to volunteer?

Chelsea: I didn't plan a long-term commitment. I toured the Fallsway location, and I am a person who experienced homelessness as a child. I lived through multiple evictions, doubling up with my grandparents and aunts and uncles. The mission spoke to me.

Cheryl: I grew up in a lower socioeconomic area of Baltimore, and I often felt like "there but for the grace of God go I." I've seen the city change. There are more people in need of support, experiencing homelessness, wrestling with addiction. The organization resonated with me. It feels like home.

Keiren: A survey of 1,500 U.S. non-profits by Board Source in 2017 showed that from 1994-2017, BIPOC have never represented more than 18% of Board composition. How do racial and gender identities of Board leaders impact a non-profits like ours?

Cheryl: It makes me stop and think about why I haven't done more and why we, as a society and an organization, haven't done more. A majority white Board speaks volumes: We're not listening; we're not getting necessary participation from the community.

Chelsea: I agree that we need to do more, but I stand here today as a young, Black woman who is currently the Board chair and former Board secretary. I think that took some intention and planning by a group of white people who saw a need to diversify. And because many leaders from Black and brown communities are taught that once you get to where you are, you bring others with you and figure out how to make the culture more inclusive, the more diversity we have the more we will continue to gain. I see that happening.

Keiren: How does having broader representation impact how we accomplish our mission?

Chelsea: It brings a variety of perspectives. When staff leadership began pushing for REI, some Board members said, "We're doing great work. You're the shining City on the Hill! We can't blame ourselves for any of this." It's hard to grapple with systematic racism without having BIPOC folks say, "Wait, you can't look around the room and see how few of me there are and say there's nothing wrong."

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Cheryl: With only one type of person on a Board, decisions are made in a vacuum. We need community. We need to listen. Without thought and discourse you don't have a product that's as meaningful.

Keiren: **In the non-profit world, we have a “savior complex.” We believe we’re doing good work, and this can make it harder to address our racism. When white people are in the majority, we don’t always pay attention to our role in creating the circumstances that clients go through. What’s at stake if we do not specifically talk about race?**

Chelsea: Oh yeah, this white savior complex is real! I've seen it play out here. We need to address clients as whole people and that means addressing the racial inequities they go through. We have to imagine being a recovering addict who is a Black man who is homeless and who's trying to get a job. If we don't talk about race and how we work and engage with clients, even on our Board, why are we here?

“This work is about more than ‘doing good deeds,’ more than feeling good because I made a donation. There are structural problems in our community.”

Cheryl: Yes, to say that these situations affect everyone equally is ridiculous. We know that's not the case. When I was faced with the question *“What role does race play in homelessness?”* I had to stop and think. This work is about more than 'doing good deeds,' more than feeling good because I made a donation. There are structural problems in our community.

Keiren: **You both volunteered to be on the new Board REI subcommittee. What do you hope comes from this work?**

Cheryl: REI isn't an easy flip of the switch. Adding more POC to the Board and committees is a baby step. When I find myself emotional in a conversation, that's a good opportunity to ask, *“What's making me uncomfortable or upset or angry?”* The Community of Practice has been really helpful. I'm hearing all these different voices

that I wouldn't normally hear. I hope we continue to be ambitious and intentional.

Chelsea: I hope to see a thematic change in approach. I struggle with exactly how we do it. Some of it starts with increased representation and then becomes a cultural change. The Board has many points of influence, but I think it's actually the “smaller” things that make the largest change, such as how our committees look at what they're doing through an REI lens. We need to be comfortable with asking, “What do our flu vaccination numbers look like for Black transgender individuals?”

Keiren: **Has the last year of REI work changed how you see the organization? What space have you occupied in REI discussions?**

Cheryl: It was an epiphany. We simply can't achieve the mission without addressing race and equity.

Chelsea: I have been a reluctant participant. As a Black female in America, and use my exact words—*I am not here to fix your shit.* You've got to fix it yourself. I will coach. I will give feedback and firsthand experience. I will listen to ideas. I will push back when you get lazy. I can't fix something I didn't make.

I'm extremely thankful for colleagues like Cheryl and Shannon [McMahon]—white women in corporate America who are like, “Yeah, no, this is broken,” and are willing to show up and do the work. I'm thankful for other Board members I've seen evolve. But I showed up as a tired Black woman with very little capacity to fix something that isn't my fault and that I am victim to every single day.

Cheryl: Chelsea, thank you for being honest. You said this early on and it made me stop and reflect. How can I learn about what other people are experiencing or how a system has harmed them if I don't have any background? You both shared materials that have been really helpful. I benefitted from this system, absolutely. I can't just walk away from that realization. We're just now starting to deconstruct and rebuild.

Chelsea: And we're laying the foundation. I think those guiding principles are how we get there: let's do it step by step and start fixing things.

Keiren: **What advice would you give nonprofit Board members who are apprehensive about REI work?**

Chelsea: You are likely serving people society has left out. Nonprofits step into the gap. But those holes were created by policies designed to benefit a certain type of person. Some inequity related to race, gender or sexual orientation created the need for your nonprofit. Step away from the “feel good” in your volunteering and figure out the “why.” We cannot move forward until we understand and reconcile our shared, ugly past. Learn that history and use that fire to drive the work forward.

Cheryl: And don’t let what you think *might* happen stop you from participating. Just do it. If you go in thinking, “I’ve already got it figured out,” you are going to be disappointed because you don’t. That’s why we need *all* of us in the room.

9 GUIDING PRINCIPLES THAT STEER OUR REI WORK

- Be explicit about race.
- Act with intention.
- Embrace discomfort.
- Apply a racial equity lens.
- Create pathways for staff leadership.
- Create a culture of inclusion.
- Center client voice.
- Support BIPOC-owned businesses.
- Promote a climate for honest feedback.

See our full REI Guiding Principles, ecological model and approach to racial equity and inclusion: www.hchmd.org/rei.



From 2004-2016, white neighborhoods in Baltimore received **3X** more capital investment than Black neighborhoods.



1 in 9 Black children has a parent in prison or jail, a rate that has more than quadrupled in the past 25 years.



People who have been incarcerated once are **7x** more likely to experience homelessness.

Sources: Pew Research Center, Urban Institute

“There are policies that say, ‘You can’t deny housing for Black or brown people.’ But you can say, ‘Do you have a criminal history?’ knowing that our criminal justice system disproportionately targets Black and brown people.”

Caryn York
CEO of Job Opportunities Task Force +
Community of Practice panelist

Is this what justice looks like?

Joseph Tayler has been trying to catch up for most of his life.

As a kid, his family moved a lot and each new school left him feeling perpetually a step behind.

“I’ve always been someone who was curious about information and knowledge,” he remembers. “I just didn’t have people who I could talk to about it.”

Embarrassment, not school, spurred him to learn how to write his last name at 12 and to read at 14. He became a voracious reader and could remember and repeat things he’d heard just once. Even so, by junior high, he dropped out.

It was only after being sentenced to life in prison as a 22-year-old that Joseph got his GED and a college degree. In some ways, prison offered more opportunity than the chronically disinvested, West Baltimore neighborhood where he grew up.

“I got a lot out of prison,” he reflects over the phone. “I ducked AIDS, the crack epidemic and senseless murders. I beat my drug addiction. I got a pretty good education in college. And I met my wife.”

At the same time, Joseph spent 43 years of his life surrounded by fences and guard towers. Other people controlled his movement: telling him when to go to bed, when to wake up and whether he could go to the bathroom. Over those decades, he couldn’t buy a home, build wealth or a career. And he saw people die senselessly in prison, too.

“It’s barbaric. They throw you in jail and then they do nothing to try to rehabilitate you,” he says, highlighting the lack of empathy in the criminal justice system. “It seems like one of the qualifications for the job is to be uncaring.” When it comes to health, he adds, “The kind of medical treatment I get now, I couldn’t have gotten in jail. It wouldn’t have been in the budget. They lose so many guys for medical reasons. Had they been home, they wouldn’t have died.”

At one of our recent *Community of Practice on Homelessness* conversations, Tara Huffman of Open Society Institute reiterated the punitive approach of our current criminal justice system, explaining, “From our birth,



After decades in prison, Joseph is grateful for time with his wife, Rhonda.

we have been fed a steady diet of ‘this is what justice looks like.’ If you’ve never been to jail, from where you sit, everything seems to be working okay.”

Since Joseph’s sentencing in 1972, the U.S. has continued to incarcerate more people than any nation in the world. It’s well documented that Black men like Joseph are disproportionately criminalized, incarcerated and given more severe sentences compared with their white counterparts. And the link between incarceration and homelessness has gotten even stronger.

Over the years, Health Care for the Homeless has worked with clients to advocate for criminal justice reform policies, including legislation to streamline expungement, provide people in Maryland prisons access to health care, decriminalize drug use, and decriminalize drug paraphernalia (a harm reduction bill which Governor Hogan callously vetoed this spring).

Yet we, as an agency and community, have a lot of work ahead to confront the broader systems at play—and to reimagine justice through the lens of eliminating structural racism.

Joseph and 200 other “lifers” took plea bargains to lower their sentences after elements of their trials were deemed unconstitutional by a higher court. And in 2014, he walked out of prison doors and reunited with his wife—who extended a rare lifeline for someone with a criminal record: housing.

More than once, he repeats that he hasn’t had a bad day in the seven years he’s been home. “I’ve had some that didn’t go according to plan—but it can’t be worse than being in a cage.”

Watch our two-part **Community of Practice** conversation about restorative justice: www.hchmd.org/topic-5



“I don’t have a house, but I’m home”

Through the isolation of COVID-19, family has been more important than ever for most of us. For sister, mother, grandmother and Uber driver, Tagerin Jackson, strong family connections have always been her lifeline.

This is true for most clients despite systems that work to keep them isolated and vulnerable:

- Our criminal justice system separates people from their families, communities and society (read more on pages 2-3).
- Shelter systems are designed for single men or women and children, but not families or men with children.
- People who are lucky enough to get a housing voucher risk losing it if friends without housing stay with them.
- Entire families, disproportionately families of color, are torn apart by the foster care system.

Sadly, efforts to address these realities head on are limited. But according to Director of Public Policy Joanna Diamond, “Several reform issues, many of which we work on, keep families together indirectly. These include decriminalization, alternatives to incarceration and moving from the congregate shelter model to prioritize permanent, supportive housing.”

Despite the barriers, on most days, you can see clients like Tagerin in our lobby with a friend or family member there to cheer them on.

Tagerin’s support system helped her seek treatment and encouraged her to prioritize her physical, mental and emotional health.

“Even through being locked up and my addiction, my family has always been there. I’m the youngest and they still spoil me,” she says. As a mother and grandmother, she does the same.

Mass incarceration has separated her from her son Frank and Frank from his own sons, but Tagerin makes sure they talk every day. She takes one of her grandsons along with her while she works so they can spend extra time together.

“I am so, so at peace and really loving life,” says Tagerin with a smile.



From Baltimore City to Ocean City, Tagerin Jackson is loving life with her family by her side.

Encouraged by family and community and rooted in her faith, this summer marked two years of sobriety for Tagerin. Her sponsor of nine years, her sister who has been sober for 26 years, and her Narcotics Anonymous support group were there to celebrate alongside her.

She currently lives with her brother, explaining, “I don’t have my own house, but I’m home. He doesn’t want me to leave.”

Now that she’s fully vaccinated (thanks to a little encouragement from her older sister), she’s visited Frank in prison and can’t wait to have even more gatherings with her family here in Baltimore.



At least
2,300
clients report
“doubling up”
with family,
friends or others.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ROCK YOUR SOCKS 5K

Saturday, November 6

Our sock-rocking 5K is baaack in person—sporting a new route in Patterson Park and plenty of swag!

Register at giving.hchmd.org/5K



Welcome home to Four Ten Lofts

When you walk into Four Ten Lofts—a new 76-unit apartment building in the heart of the Bromo Tower Arts and Entertainment District—you’re greeted with art on the walls, tasteful pops of color and a beautiful open courtyard off of the community room.

The apartments are spacious with huge windows for natural light and a washer and dryer, too. You might find yourself thinking, “Now, this is a place I could live.”

This summer, 20 people exiting homelessness will make good on that thought, moving into apartments at Four Ten Lofts with the assistance of Health Care for the Homeless supportive housing staff. They’ll join artists and market-rate renters occupying the other 56 residences.

“I don’t think Dan or I need a whole lot of data to tell us that housing is better than homelessness,” President & CEO Kevin Lindamood says, reflecting on the collaboration with Dan McCarthy, Executive Director of Episcopal Housing Corporation and co-developer with The French Companies. “It’s obvious! And the solution is equally simple: we should be investing in affordable housing.”

Baltimore still needs more housing.

There are only **4** affordable homes



for every **10** households that need them.



In the months before move-in, volunteers from the United Way of Central Maryland stocked all 20 supportive housing apartments with essentials to make empty spaces feel like home, including toilet paper, towels, shower curtains, shelf-stable foods and even rugs and vacuums. And donors contributed \$95,000 to fully furnish them.

“Welcome home” mats lay ready to greet each new resident.



Get an inside peek into this unique housing collaboration through our Four Ten Lofts video series. www.hchmd.org/videos



One of 20 Four Ten Lofts apartments that are move-in ready for people exiting homelessness.