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**The City of New York  
Community Board 8 Manhattan  
Social Justice Committee  
Monday, October 23, 2023 – 6:30PM  
*This meeting was conducted via Zoom***

**MINUTES**

***CB8 Members Present:*** Sarah Chu, Saundra I. Coleman, Valerie Mason, Rita Popper, Wendy Machaver (Public Member)

1. Presentation by Director John Bae and Senior Program Associate Jacqueline Altamirano Marin, the Opening Doors to Housing Initiative at Vera Institute of Justice Increasing housing access for people with conviction histories.
  - A person’s conviction history should never be a barrier to housing. Currently, conviction histories can result in the loss of voting rights and create barriers to employment and housing.
  - In US, 70M people have some type of criminal history and 20M have a felony conviction. Because of a one-time interaction with the criminal legal system, people can face barriers in perpetuity.
  - Formerly incarcerated people are:
    - 10x more likely to be unhoused
    - Unhoused people are 11x more likely to come into contact with law enforcement
    - 203 per 10k formerly incarcerated people are unhoused across the country
  - Housing promotes public safety and is essential for successful reentry.
  - Studies show that stable housing improves reintegration and desistance, lower recidivism.
  - Research demonstrates that:
    - Conviction histories are not a good predictor of housing success
    - Most people with a conviction don’t have another one
    - Excluding people with conviction histories doesn’t make housing complexes safer
    - [Vera report: Opening Doors to Affordable Housing: The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program and People with Conviction Histories](#)
      - 50 state scan of low-income housing tax credit program in relation to people with conviction histories
      - Housing finance agencies are seeking to overcome these barriers with:
        - Educational outreach programs
        - Creating incentives for developers
        - Baking in certain tenant screening policies that prevent criminal background discrimination
    - Example: LA Housing Corporation tenant screening policies are in line with a lot of best practices.
    - NYCHA
      - Family Re-entry Program
        - Vera teamed up with NYCHA to solve the problem of returning residents not being able to join their loved ones post incarceration.
        - Program allows people to have a temporary permission to live with a family member for 2 years. During this time, the family’s rent does not change and the returning resident will have access to reentry services.
        - After 2 years, participants are eligible to be added to family lease.
        - Leases are not jeopardized if a person doesn’t complete the program.

- 145 graduates that successfully completed the program, 54 of whom were added back to the family lease.
  - A lot of folks coming home to elderly parents.
  - Best thing to do something else
  - Since the program began, 320 people have participated. Only 5 were convicted of a subsequent crime and none were for violent crime.

**Q&A (Summarized for brevity)**

Q: How big is the NYCHA reunification program?

A: NYCHA is always looking for people interested in joining the program. There are 13 direct service providers who work with NYCHA who introduce people to the program. It has been up and running for several years and they are still trying to get the word out.

Q: What happens during and after the 2 years?

A: During the two-year program, participants are temporarily added to the lease so their income isn't calculated into the rent. They are invited to be added to the lease after 2 years and at that point, their income will be calculated into the rent. The tenancy of a family is not affected if someone gets reconvicted. They can go back through the program. A lot of 1:1 and really hands on.

Q: Are parole offices making families aware of this program?

A: The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) was a key agency at the table from inception.

Q: Is this program being offered to people before release?

A: The program tries to capture people about to be released. Outreach occurs at the Queensboro housing complex, and through organizations like Fortune and Exodus. There is a need to get the word out further.

Q: Do you have demographic information for the participants?

A: Don't have that information.

Q: What happens to people who complete the program, but don't join the lease? Can NYCHA please them in their own apartments?

A: NYCHA has long waiting lists and haven't heard about new placements through the family reunification program. In some housing authorities, participants have been able to get housing without a family reunification program, for example, with scaled back look back periods.

Q: What happens when a person is returning home and their family has moved out of NYCHA?

A: If a family moves out of NYCHA and they want to reunite, they could try to add their family member to the lease, but given what we know about housing provider policies, the chances are slim. That person and their family will need to make difficult choices. They could live there, but if something happens, it could jeopardize the lease.

Q: How are social services integrated for coordinated support?

A: For the first six months, the participant works with the direct service provider to map out benchmarks and goals. They also follow up with check in calls and keep a constant conversation going with NYCHA and the participant. Each organization has its own process.

Q: How does Clean Slate impact these programs?

A: Clean Slate is an expansive policy that removes or seals records of convictions and makes sure some entities don't have access to it, like employers. It takes eight years of conviction free to reach the threshold. Clean Slate removes collateral consequences for thousands of New Yorkers. The most critical time period is the first 2 years after reentry and that is the period where the family reunification program is very important.

Q: How does NYCHA define "family"?

A: NYCHA defines family as two or more people who are related by blood, marriage, guardianship, partnership, or court awarded custody. Generally - mother, father, siblings, grandparents, sons, daughters, and grandchildren.

Q: Who are the most important stakeholders to have in the room to implement these programs?

A: Having worked with a few different housing authorities, our job is to support the housing authority to help them get everybody to the table. Folks are having great conversations in these communities, often in different rooms, and we can help bring them together. Collaborations should include law enforcement (Department of Corrections, law enforcement), advocates, and justice involved people (to center their experiences), tenant boards, community boards, among others. Policy development will require both top down and grassroots input as community members have loved ones who are impacted by justice involvement.

Q: Are there any barriers to this program?

A: This is not exclusive to the program, but it's important to break through narratives about criminal histories because they are not related to tenant outcomes or the false notion that criminal histories make someone a bad tenant. [Most people who enter the system and leave never recidivate](#). We often gravitate to the most extreme cases and put a blanket narrative on folks. We need to decouple that myth.

Q: In addition to housing, what about employment? Is there a link between jobs and housing?

A: Housing is critical and foundational. Factors that help people desist from crime include employment and education. These factors are also interrelated.

Q: A past CB8 panel included a person who runs Greyston Bakery, a bakery that is staffed by justice involved people. Recidivism in that program is very low.

A: That makes sense - laying the foundation with housing or employment can help build a successful community around folks to survive and desist from crime and contribute to public safety.

2. **Old Business** – None
3. **New Business** - None

**This meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm**

*Saundrea I. Coleman and Sarah Chu, Co-Chairs*

# Vera

**Housing Access for People with Conviction Histories**

John Bae, Opening Doors Initiative

Jacqueline Altamirano Marin, Opening Doors Initiative

October 23, 2023

# Vera's vision, mission, and focus

## Vision

Safe, healthy, empowered communities and a fair, accountable justice system.

## Mission

To end the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty.

### STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

1. End criminalization of people of color and immigrant communities
2. Minimize the footprint of jails, prisons, and detention centers
3. Center dignity and minimize the harms of justice and immigration systems
4. Blueprint accountable institutions that move resources to communities

# Housing is a Human Right

A person's conviction history should never be a barrier to housing.



# Housing for People with Conviction Histories

**10X**

Formerly incarcerated people are **10 times more likely to be unhoused.**

**203**

per 10,000 people

The **relationship between homelessness and incarceration is cyclical.**

# Housing promotes **public safety** and is essential for **successful reentry**

- Stable housing supports improved reintegration and desistance from criminal behavior for people leaving prison
- Housing makes it more likely that a person returning to their community:
  - finds and keeps employment
  - gets connected to medical, mental, and behavioral healthcare
  - rebuilds supportive and prosocial networks within their community
  - reestablishes mutually supportive bonds with family
- Housing access is associated with lower recidivism

(Lebel, 2017; Lutze et al, 2014; Metreaux and Culhane, 2004; Metraux et al, 2020; Nelson et al, 1999; Rosenfeld and Grigg, 2022)



# Conviction history is not a good predictor of housing success

- Most people with a conviction never have another one.
- There is no evidence that excluding people with a conviction makes housing complexes safer.
- There is no evidence that people with conviction histories have different tenancy outcomes that those without a history of conviction.

(Bushway et al, 2022; Malone 2009; Rhodes et al, 2016; Rosenfeld and Grigg, 2022)

# Opening Doors to Affordable Housing

Opening Doors to Affordable Housing: The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program and People with Conviction Histories (2023)

Opening Doors webpage:  
<https://www.vera.org/investing-in-communities/opening-doors-to-housing-initiative>



# Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) Policies for Criminal Background Screening

Tenant screening policies must achieve, “substantial, legitimate, nondiscriminatory interests.” The policy also stipulates that housing providers:

- may not consider arrests, charges that did not result in a conviction, and records from the juvenile legal system
- apply specified lookback periods for certain types of convictions (3 to 5 years)
- consider reasonable accommodations if conviction was related to a person’s disability
- must allow applicants to submit mitigating evidence for an individualized assessment

# New York City Housing Authority



## NYCHA Family Re-Entry Program:

- The Family Re-Entry Program offers people recently released from correctional facilities (including prison, jail, or juvenile facilities) an opportunity to live with family in NYCHA housing.

## Program features:

- Temporary permission to live with family for two years. *Rent does not change for two years.*
- Participants receive reentry services throughout the program.
- Upon successful completion of two-year program, participants are eligible to be added to a family's lease.

## Collaborative partners:

- Referral and supportive services provided by 13 reentry service providers.
- Key partners include Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, Department of Homeless Services, and Corporation for Supportive Housing.

# New York City Housing Authority

**145** graduates have successfully completed Family Re-Entry and **54** have been successfully added back to the lease.

