**Social Issue Spotlight Series: Housing and Homelessness**

**SPEAKERS**

Kimberly Swartz

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:37:19

All right, so we can officially kick off our panel. Now it looks like we've reached critical mass. And if folks jump in later, that's totally fine. We are recording this event and we'll share out the recording with everybody who registered for it. But just to kick us off, I want to say thank you, everyone for for joining. And whether it's a lunch and learn or maybe a breakfast and learn. I know we've got a lot of folks joining from the West Coast. We're really happy to have you here.

So on behalf of the whole taproot team, thanks so much for jumping in to our social issues spotlight panel on housing and homelessness. So, as you may have heard, taproot has really invested heavily in volunteerism research. And one of our biggest learnings has been folks in our community and beyond, really want more education, about the social issues that are impacting their community and communities across the country across the globe. And one of the ways that we're helping facilitate this greater access to information is just like creating these community led spaces, where our nonprofit partners can speak about the work that they're doing, why that work is so important, and how people can take action in support of that work. So creating additional cross sector understanding and, and moments for empathy. So, as I mentioned, we're not the experts in this cause right taproot is in the volunteerism space. We support organizations working to end homelessness, but we're not the experts in this field at all.

And so, we are going to be elevating some of the voices and work of our nonprofit partners who really are leading the way in this space today. So I'm going to take a moment to introduce each of our nonprofits as speakers in just a moment. And we'll also take time at the end and in our follow up materials, to share out how these organizations could use your support. So we'll share out some pro bono consulting opportunities as well as other links, other ways that you can connect with our speakers to take direct action. And I also want to take this moment to say a quick thank you to everyone who submitted questions in advance of this panel. When you are registering, we'll be using some of the most popular questions to kick off our panel discussion. But everyone on the line is encouraged, please use the q&a, the chat box to ask additional questions throughout the conversation. And time depending towards the end, or towards the second half of our panel. We're also going to invite folks to raise your virtual zoom hand, and we'll invite you to come off of mute and ask questions and chat with our panelists alive as well.

So a few other just quick logistics notes, we are recording this, we don't want to miss out on any great insights that our panelists share. And so we'll share out that recording link later today with everyone who registered, and we'll also publish it on the taproot site for easy viewing. We will ask that folks, please keep yourself muted. If you're not actively asking a question of our panelists, or if you're not one of our panelists, speakers, obviously. So use that chat box to keep the conversation going in the interim. And if you need any tech assistance throughout the event, I have my colleague Megan Gillette on the line, who's virtually standing by ready to assist, and she has taproot support in her name, and so you can easily find her in the chat box. Okay, so with those logistics out of the way, I want to really get things rolling here with some introductions.

My name is Kimberly Swartz. I'm Taproot’s director of community engagement and my pronouns are she her hers, and I will be the moderator during today's panel. So we had a solid chunk of registrants for this event share during that registration process that they were new to our nonprofit, they were new to taproot. So a quick introduction to our organization. Taproot Foundation is a US based nonprofit that connects nonprofits with business support that they need for free. And we do that by facilitating connections with talented professionals from the worlds of marketing, HR, IT finance strategy and more with the social good organizations. So to date, we've connected over 30,000 volunteers with 10,000 different nonprofit Oregon associations for pro bono services totaling over 280 million. So the pathway for finding volunteering opportunities through our organization is called taproot plus, which is a free online matchmaking site. And so I don't want to take up too much more time talking about taproot because this space is really for you all to learn about housing and homelessness and to highlight some of taproots nonprofit partners in this space. So I'm going to ask my colleague Megan to just drop the link to tap requests in the chat. And if you do have any questions specific about taproot, we can commit to following up with you privately after this event.

But for the time being, I want to put the focus back on our nonprofit panelists, and I'm going to start with some introductions. So our first nonprofit is Eden's shift. Eden shift is a nonprofit located in Brockton, Massachusetts, that empowers people experiencing homelessness and poverty, and enhances their life through compassionate and high quality diverse services. So their focus is really on awakening hope and dignity, and every person that walks through their door. And so I'm really pleased that we're joined by Darlene Sherman, who is the founder of Eden shift. She's passionate about getting the community of people experiencing housing insecurity, choices and resources to maximize their goals and life purpose. as someone who formally experienced homelessness while with a newborn, she can relate to these struggles, and makes it her mission to change the traditional views of poverty to install hope and dignity for every person who is fighting to make a change. So thank you so much Darley for joining us. We're excited to learn from you today.

Our second nonprofit that's on the line today is Seeds outreach services. Seeds is a nonprofit located in the San Francisco Bay Area that aims to serve as a critical partner in the fight against youth homelessness. Their mission is to create a mobile flexible platform for street outreach, providing food and supplies and other supportive services while partnering with other public agencies and nonprofit organizations to ensure enhanced youth have direct access to specific tools and resources that are needed. So we're really pleased and honored to be joined by Rachel Manor, who is the product and acceleration advisor at seeds outreach services. After a 20 year career and tech creating and launching products, Rachel followed her heart and jumped into nonprofit consulting, helping organizations articulate their value proposition and create products and services that align with our mission and allow them to grow up in a really sustainable way. So she's been a part of seeds outreach services for the past year and has worked with the executive director to develop the organization's value, prop narrative and strategy. And she shared that it's been one of the most fulfilling and challenging experiences of her professional life. So Rachel, really happy to have you on the line today, especially because we're joined by so many of our volunteer partners during today's event, and I wonder if any of them have similar stories and careers in the tech space or other parts of the corporate realm and are perhaps contemplating a shift or wondering if there's more mission driven work that they could be engaging in. So really going to be looking forward to your perspective on that.

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:46:08

And then finally, we're joined by the team at the Midtown South Community Council. Midtown South Community Council is a nonprofit located in Midtown Manhattan, New York City. And they strive to dismantle the intersectional causes of homelessness by building an equitable, just and sustainable social infrastructure to ensure that dignity, health, and a home for all are possible. So they're envisioning a city where homelessness and poverty are eradicated, and healthcare is free of profit motives. So we're lucky enough to be joined by a few members of their team today. So I'm going to quickly run through some brief introductions for each. They'll each be jumping in on a variety of questions, since they're all tackling different aspects of their coalition's work. So first of all, John Mudd is on the line. He's been the executive director of the Council for over 36 years, and is advocating for basic human principles of health, housing, dignity, and a fair justice system. And so he's a community organizer, writer fitness Ouch and much, much more. So very glad to be joined by John on the line today. Rob Robinson is a formerly homeless community organizer and activist based in New York City, whose work focuses on changing people's fundamental relationships with Land and Housing. So he works with social movements around the world, and is a longtime member of the US Human Rights Network. And so his work is really framed in this idea of international human rights law. So thank you so much, Rob, we're really going to be looking forward to your unique insight here. And then finally, we're joined by Ted Houghton, who is the president of Gateway housing, a nonprofit initiative to transform New York City's response to homelessness by developing innovative new shelters and affordable housing programs and residences. So prior to being at Gateway, Ted also served as the Executive Deputy Commissioner of New York State Homes and Community when new all overseeing the state's affordable housing agencies. And so as you can tell, we have a really Experienced, expert panel made up of perspectives from across the country. And so really looking forward to learning about how each of these communities is focused on tackling housing insecurity, and the eradication of homelessness and all of the different societal factors that intersect and lead to that concern for community members. So with all of that said, I want to start hearing from our expert panelists, and so Darley, I wonder if you would be comfortable with me posing this question to you first, I would love to have you help us help everyone on the line, learn more about the work that you're doing, and the issue impacting community members in your community. So tell us about who you serve and how you serve them.

16:49:25

Darlene Sherman here. I serve the homeless community. We don't have a particular niche. So homeless kids, homeless females, you're homeless we serve you. Right now. We're basically just doing the best that we can, and feeding them supplying them with materials that they need. Helping them with resources. Like for right now, I'm helping the immigrant homeless right now. So we just help them file documents, help them get connected with pro bono lawyers and things like that. So right now, it's just all about collaboration with the community to see how we all can help each other,

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:50:16

Yeah. And I mean, you named five different things, I think in that response, right, legal services, health and nutrition. And so I'm sure what a trend line that we're going to hear throughout is not only collaboration with individual community members, but collaboration with other nonprofit organizations as well. Yes, I'm, Rachel, I saw you nodding your head to a few things that Darlene was sharing. So I wonder if I can jump over to you? And have you answer the same question. Tell us more about the work that you're doing? And why.

16:50:52

So for me personally, I've done street outreach as a teenager, in a low income neighborhood, in my city. And they didn't call it Street Outreach at the time, they basically just gave us a key to a community center and said, those kids are on the streets. And we've been doing that mean, my friends been doing that three times a week for several years. And it's just, we've done homework with them with Play Games. And I just keep going back to that those times thinking about how impactful that work was, and I was just having fun, you know. And when I heard about seeds, I just, you know, the thought of nobody should be homeless, right? Especially children and young adults, like the thought of people so young being on the street by themselves just is so so sad. So I just that what kind of prompted me to jump in and help and who we serve, so I love how Darline said, you're homeless we serve you. Were Moulton most more focused on kids, ages 14 to 24. So minors and young adults who are unaccompanied I'm meaning they're alone in the street and this population have we found slightly different needs than adults, or children living with adults.

Basically, we go to where the kids are at, and we give them basics, supplies and survival. Just it comes down to this list of things very food water, called weather supplies and survival gear. And so that's one thing we do. And the other things that we do, which is just equally as important is we develop a connection with them, to help them to help build the trust between them and adults and the system so that they can in turn be referred to government agencies that can give them the shelter, give them you know, whatever else they need, case management services, etc.

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:53:17

That's wonderful. So it's going beyond the basic providing a service, but it's building a relationship building trust, and letting these children letting these young adults know that they deserve the assault weapons, they deserve the right to demand this help from the community as well. I really liked how you, you framed your response with them. The right to housing and shelter is a basic human right and something that we should all be fighting for. And, John, I know that's something that you and the council feel really strongly as well. And so I wonder if you could quickly introduce us to this idea of who is who is your organization serving and why?

16:54:02

Well, we serve people with no income, no housing, to the elderly to tentatively housed. You know, we're all on shaky ground 47% Our cost burden, it goes right up the ladder to all of us, really, you we don't have the housing. So our, our pillars are health, hunger and housing. And, and we do that through through our programs or committees, we're developing more committees. And, and there's a lot of people that are hungry, and it's never been so obvious to me, or so brilliantly laid out to me is as of this year, we one of our programs is farming, urban farming. And we started the farm upstate, and we were bringing food down. So we were able to expand our network, we had a city farm first and, and we were giving it to members, you know, a few members, but we were able to expand our outreach. And, and we found in, in a lot of these gatherings, you know, like encore, and Hartley house, which is a place where elderly people who live in the city, who are House who are retired, and it was just amazing to see the need for nutritious food.

And so yeah, I think that was in how we do it is networking, we try to break down the silos and networking because this isn't going to be solved and by just one company or agency or even president and it's so it's really important for the network to happen. And the housing is the core without stable housing for someone that and not where they're spending most of their money for the housing is really essential. And this is the key. And that's why Ted and Rob and some of these people I connected with who are who are really know what's what's really important, is essential, and there's a lot of people, a lot of organizations and I'm and I'm very appreciative to have Ted and and Rob involved with with the council.

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:56:33

That has to be a coalition, right? It's not gonna really want to underline and highlight what you mentioned there around. It's going to take a village. It's an incredibly intersectional issue and no one solution no one organization is going to be able no one president or person is going to be able to solve it completely. And actually, Rob, John was just speaking your praises just now but I'd love to pass the mic to you and hear about your perspective on why is this work so important and pressing in this moment?

16:57:09

Sure. So thank you. Thank you to taproot. Thank you to John for inviting me. Just quickly, I always get amazed in the spaces of the people that I know can connect with I have connections with Sastra with Dolly in Boston, Massachusetts area, I've worked with city like beat Obama for years. I'll go out to Rachel out hit seeds, the Western Regional advocacy project I call family, la can Sisters of Hope up in Oregon, a lot of folks out there on the West Coast, I talk to on a regular basis and work with on a regular basis. And then somebody in the chat name Yolanda, put legal services, I work very closely because you have to change policy to, to guarantee a right to housing. So all these forces have to work together, as John was stating earlier, but for me, it became apparent after coming up the streets and spending 10 months.

So just quickly for background, I spent two and a half years on the streets of Miami 10 Mountain in New York City homeless shelter. And it, it sort of transformed the way I think about fundamental relationship to Land and Housing. I came out banging the table saying we need housing, we need housing, we need affordable housing. But you'll never control housing to control the land underneath it. And that was a learning experience for me. And I've learned that outside of the US from groups in Brazil and South Africa or struggling for the right to land. So that's a big pilot. But I also heard somebody in the comments mention a right to Shelton, it'd be interesting to see what Ted says to this because in New York, we have a right to shelter law, which guarantees people a right to shelter on any given day, than the right to housing don't conflate the two is the right to shelter on any given night, if I now go to New York City time says I need a place to sleep, they are obligated to give you a bed that's led to close to 600 shelters in New York, but some 60,000 people a night sleeping in those shelters, that doesn't get it the root cause of the problem, it just expands the industrial complex of what I call the shelter system. So you know, looking at these problems, and digging down deep, is where I spent a lot of my time and you know, I continue to do that. And think critically, I'm just back from Barcelona. So legal services, again, I've worked with my pop up French group, Spanish group in Spain that defended a family against eviction, the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, right on the street 50 members of a power out there with the landlord's lawyer, and the negotiation happened right in the middle of the street, and the family is still in that house today. So getting involved in all these networks and learning from other movements around the world is a big part of the work that I'm involved in.

**Kimberly Swartz** 16:59:46

Yeah, I really am. Again, this through line of every single one of us, our voice has a lot of power here. And there's going to be a lot of potential action items for all of us walking away from this, whether you're located in New York, or Boston, or the Bay Area, I guarantee that there is a local housing insecurity or a local shelter in your community that you can immediately turn to and say, Where do you need me? Can I be a voice for you? Can I join you on the street? Can I do something to help you build your infrastructure, something pro bono, there are going to be options for us to join this coalition of support. So Ted, I want to bounce to you next, because Rob shouted you out and said you may have some thoughts on this site of shelter as a human right. So please tell us more about your perspective on this issue and why this work matters.

17:00:50

Um, I'm not sure why Rob is picking on me. But, you know, it's interesting, because New York City has a right to shelter. And that, to me is a very good thing. I started out at the Coalition for the Homeless, who the people that that first were able to litigate and get the right to shelter. But it does have unintended consequences in that. And I believe there should be a right to shelter. I mean, we don't want people living on the streets and we want to get people indoors. That's the very first thing. No one does well on the streets. It's really takes years off your life. And we need to get people into safety. And we need to do that right away and having the consent decree that's in place in New York City, that that requires government to make sure that everybody gets a bed is a very important part of our response. The unintended consequences of that are twofold one on the on the good side, it really has pushed the city to commit to creating more affordable and specifically supportive housing for formerly homeless people with on site services. But you know, that is not the primary response.

The city is mostly focused on making sure they have shelter capacity, and so we've gone from Um, you know, a need of about 800 shelter beds when the consent decree was first arrived at in 1981, to over 60,000, probably closer to 75,000 people in shelters each night in New York City today. And, you know, the need is relentless, and the city is focused on creating more shelter beds to to respond to that need, rather than creating more units of permanent housing that people in the shelters can move to, so that we free up some beds in the in the shelter system, the length of stay in the shelter system has gone from a few months, the average length of stay now is over 400 days. And that's where families that's for single adults, that's for couples without children. And nobody should be living in the shelter system that long. It's just not healthy for children. And that's an average, that means some children, they're spending four or five years of their youth in a shelter. And as nice as we might make those institutions, they're still institutions and people should be living in housing. This has helped drive our creation of housing. And midtown south has been a really good advocate for more housing. But the fact is, there's a lot of not in my backyard types of resistance. And there's a lot of other kinds of regulatory barriers for creating housing really quickly. And I mean, homelessness is a very specific instance, and result of an of a larger housing shortage that we we have in the United States. And we're just not building enough housing quickly enough. And that's partly because our expectations have grown to the what quality that housing should be, which is a good thing, but the unintended consequences that some people are without housing that.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:04:29

Yeah, I think you bring up so many interesting points, and I am seeing some good chats come in and a lot of nodding reactions around the room as well. It's, um, now people are demanding and stepping up their expectations around. Okay, instead of just addressing a symptom of housing by providing shelter for a night, how can we address the root causes of what feeds into this, and then provide more supportive community services? Along the way? I want to transition into a question that one of our attendees submitted prior to the event, which is around common misconceptions that people have around the population of people experiencing homelessness. There's a lot of myths out there. Someone just called out one of those myths in the chat. And so, Rachel, I hope you don't mind if we start with you. What are some of the common myths that you hear about folks experiencing homelessness? And what can we do to help dispel these myths?

17:05:43

Yeah. So in, in my view, I think the public image of a homeless person is the biggest misconception about unhoused people. And I think that the true face of homelessness is on using streets. Most homeless people do not want to be homeless, they're going to do whatever it takes not to look homeless. And to someday, they might feel that they feed themselves. So the single mom, you know, who lives with her kids in their car, or the 16 year old boy who has been kicked out of the house because they came out to their parents, these people will remain unseen, to the public. And I truly believe that people are not hopeless, given the right resources, giving the right support, that they were not given by others themselves. And so I think that we have so much to gain from giving those resources and giving that support to these people. And I truly believe in their power to help themselves. So I think this is, in my view is the biggest misconception. And how to how to change that I think just education just educating the public about the real situation? Um, yeah, would is the only way?

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:07:28

Yeah. And that happens through conversations like this one conversations with your neighbors conversations with your family members. So I really would love to hear your thoughts on this question as well, because I'm sure through your work and through your life experience, you've experienced these misconceptions and the negative effects of these misconceptions.

17:07:55

Right, um, you know, you would think these misconceptions would die down after a while. And they come from all levels of people from CEOs down to, you know, teenagers, and the most conceptions I usually get is, why don't they just get a job? You know, and this is not really, everybody's situation, situation is different. So you can't really explain it's not easy to get a job. Maybe now, because it's COVID, everywhere, it's hiring. But even so, if you're dealing with mental health, if you're dealing with trauma, you know, if you're not in the proper healing stage, you really can't focus and stay at a job. You know, if you don't have somewhere to shower, you know, you really will do the interview, but I'll give you a call back and never hear from them. So it's not easy, but that's the main, I get a lot of misconception, but that's the main one, like, why don't they just get a job? But it's really not easy. But how do you explain that to someone? You know, it's not that easy to get a job once your mind is made up? It's made up? You know?

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:09:04

I mean, you named like three different factors to keep in mind their lack of access to technology phone, if you don't have a phone, how are you supposed to stay in touch with the hiring manager? Right? If you don't have access to shelter or hygienic? avenues? How are you supposed to be prepared to go into interviews? If you don't have access to childcare? How are you supposed to go interview in the first place much less? Go take your shifts at a job? So there's so many factors at play here. And I appreciate you bringing those up? John, I saw your head really nodding throughout a lot of what Darlie and Rachel are mentioning, so we would really love to hear your thoughts on this as well.

17:09:44

Definitely right on. I think, well, let's start with the face of homelessness and the people who live on the streets or are only about 5%. We got people with two jobs, two jobs, three jobs, families, a good portion of families, domestic violence. Just in the housing that we think we have no housing, it's, it's what they call affordable is laughable. And, and when we have this homeless issue there, people you've heard everybody uses, they like to the politics of around this is horrible. It's their people who live on the streets are used as political punching bag. You've heard this whole outrage, of crime and so forth. They're pointing the fingers at homelessness. I mean, most of the time, they're being you know, at the brunt end of violence. You've got Mayor, the mayor is off on a lot of tangents because they don't want to take care of the responsibility. There's its policies that's driving this.

And that's why it's so important to hit the ground and work up because what they're doing is they're they're pushing us all out of living. They're making New York City a commercialized piggy bank so it's a policies that drive it this can be cured. There's answers to this, but there's no real political will and that's why a critical mass on the ground with coalition's has got to move this, it's not going to come through voting or, or come through them. I mean, they’ll, they'll go ahead and put out fires and keep putting up same fires and to look like they're doing something it's all optics driven. So you know, the policies I mean, it's it's the real estate that the grab the hold on this city, the for the real estate industry is it's almost unpatentable sometimes, you know, I think I have a pretty decent handle on it. But I mean, they they've got their hands in everyone's pockets and they want every piece of property. They're reaching into NYCHA properties and they want to be the answer to the problems on NYCHA while we let NYCHA dilapidated, we did not take care of NYCHA is a public housing, and for decades, it's been, hasn't been funded well, and so it's deteriorated where people have had problems with boilers and mold. And that's our safety in the shelter. That's, that's our doing. Why this, because the bow, it's a, it's sort of a pact between government and private partnerships is what it is what it amounts to there. And this rules, every aspect of our lives, from water to, to the air we breathe to spaces, to housing to health. And that's why health is a real huge component into our, our, you know, is one of our biggest one of our pillars, you know, but I'll leave it at because I know, I know, Rob and Ted will have something to add here.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:13:25

And yeah, what I'm hearing if I could quickly summarize from that is that we need to keep up a persistent, consistent drumbeat when it comes to the politics of this issue. But that's a long term solution. So short term, we all need to look for ways locally, that we can get involved on the ground. Tara, I see you just raised your hand, do you want to come off of mute and ask a question directly on our panels?

17:13:52

Yeah, I'm so certainly, I'm hearing all of you I agree with everything you're saying in regards to policy. But to me, a driving force of so much of this is this perverse capitalism that we live in now. And so what do we do about really challenging that? Because that's related to the lack of political will to solve some of these problems, because we keep saying, well let the market just take care of it, right. Like, this is what housing goes for now. So this is what the market will allow. And we know that's not true. We know, during COVID, they manipulated the market by not putting housing, open housing back on the market at lower rates, they held on to them here in New York City, when they could have rented things at lower rates, because they didn't want to rent them at lower rates, they just held on to them, let them stay, you know, on an unused until they could get even more money for them. So how do we really go after this notion of and connecting this issue? Yeah, and and kind of really address this perverse issue of capitalism in its current form that we have now. I'm not attacking capitalism as an idea. I'm attacking the way it's playing out right now.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:15:11

And I love the question, Rob, I saw you immediately react to what Tara was saying aunty plug something in the chat. So I want to pass the mic to you first is a photo you'll all love in the chat. It's me the Tuesday before Thanksgiving in an anarchist bookstore in Barcelona, Spain. Tara city you every Friday morning, I sit and have coffee with a progressive economist by the name of Richard Wolff. Richard was a professor emeritus from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is now a visiting scholar at the New School in New York where I teach. And he's helped me to understand the causes and effects of capitalism and what it does. So this is a story thing for another time, much like John just said, as a concept, I have a problem with it. And obviously, if you look at that photo, you'll see I have a problem with it. But I think that's we have to bring popular and political education into communities. This issue when you raise the word, capitalism, maybe 10 years ago, people push back on you, right, but we have to discuss it. We have to understand the roles of a production in society, what we've what roles we play as workers, and your mindset will change. This is part of the transformation and I went to a being homeless, what I quickly learned from my experience, and I worked in it before I started volunteering with grassroots community organizations.

And I will say to everybody on this call, I don't get paid by a single organization. So a volunteer work because it comes from here when you do it that way. I think poverty has never been addressed in this country, the wealthiest country in the world and its fundamental problems. Rents rise faster than wages do. Right? So there's a problem right there. And people are always we're always going to be hamsters on a wheel trying to catch up. This idea of, of what a homeless person looks like, is what drove me into this work. as I was coming out of shelter, I kept hearing you're homeless because you don't want to work. You're homeless because you don't have an education. Should you're homeless because you have a chemical addiction or an alcohol addiction, but you're homeless because you have mental illness. So the last one, so reason we need to describe people and not help them, we need to help people in that condition, we should show some humanity, but I wouldn't homeless. After working with my dad, since I was nine years old, I grew up in the restaurant business. So go on Saturdays with my dad's I always worked and worked since I was nine years old. I have a college degree from the University of Maryland, never diagnosed with a chemical or an alcohol addiction, and never diagnose mental illness. So I needed to find more people and start to share the stories.

Ted has probably heard my story 100 times he's known me over 10 years, I left picture of homeless in 2009. I knew Ted when I was in Picture the Homeless, right, but telling the story over and over and over again. And finally more encouraging others to tap to share their stories, then you're collecting data. And data leads to trends, trends are a problem. If our people are trending towards homelessness, wisdom, proof, often in communities, we think of data as surveillance, are they using that against me, and let me show you how to collect some stuff, some data and make your arguments in support of what you're going through and how to make social change. So it's been a big part of my work here. And in New York, around the country and around the world, especially around the evictions. I work with a bunch of young folks who understand data, we have a New York City open data portal, that puts information in there from the city level, but it's useless to the average guy. But if you bring all these smart young folks together to reach in that box, and pull out the puzzle pieces, they put it together and make a coherent story that you can make an argument to take back to your political people or have an argument with one thing it favor, I just say quickly, and then I shut up, we have a shift here in New York. And I think it can be it can be a positive shift. If the person is given autonomy to make change.

Now there's a new chief housing officer in the Adams administration. I'm still a little wary about Adams. But I think Jessica cash will hold that position now has a vision that's unusual for somebody in her position. She sent me an email in January when she took the job. And she says, I want to bring people with lived experience to the table advocates who are directly impacted. I sent her a list of 26 names. And some of them are the usual suspects at TED. And I know well, Ted, and I've been in spaces in the continuum of care with them for years. If you send me back an email, she says not not to usual suspects. I want people like you brought that lived through this to come to the table and make decisions. And now we're meeting on a regular basis. I have a meeting this afternoon. But that group, you know, how do we make change? She put together a homeless and housing plan. How do we implement this plan? So I think change is on the horizon. It is long term. We shouldn't expect change overnight. But some things have to shift in the city. And I think we really need to address poverty. Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King both took bullets addressing this issue of poverty, and we still have an escaped ID. And they were both killed and 60. So 60 years later, we're still stuck in the same place.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:20:26

Yeah. It's it's a long road. It's a long march. And I think it's a sign of, of optimism and good things to come in the future that we have groups together like the group on this call, who are passionate about making that long road. A little bit more easy to traverse.

17:20:49

Thank you say one thing. Yeah, please. And then I want to make sure we popped up to Pat for her question.

17:20:55

Hera, thanks for bringing that in. I was going to bring that up. And I thought, well, maybe that's a little too broad. And that's what thanks. So I appreciate that. I was going to put that in. I want you on our team. So connect with me, please.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:21:10

Yes. And, Rob, were you mentioned in your response, a few resources, we're going to follow up with you and get those links so we can share them out. And the same with Darlie. Rachel, Ted, John, everyone has shared out the references to other community resources. We'll make sure we include those in the follow up. Pat would love for you to come off of mute and ask you

17:21:35

Hi, everybody. I can't get my camera working. But I just wanted to. Well, first of all, commend you all for the wonderful work you're doing. It's so worthwhile, it's hard, but it's so worthwhile. A couple of things. One is I'm in the Philadelphia area. I know there's a gentleman I don't remember his name. But he basically said to himself one day you know what a homeless people really need the most they need a house they need some place to live that's stable. And so what did he do? He bought a renovate a renovated a an old hotel that was available, and he turned it into housing for the homeless. He asked services for them bagged up and jobs and all sorts of things and lo and behold, the people thrived. So that's a model that I'm wondering if if any of you have Are you know involved with or have you know, at have, you know any connection with and how successful that's that's becoming? And also in New York in particular, in my hometown? I understand the mayor recently implemented something were mentally ill people who are homeless are taken to the hospital rather than to a shelter, let's say. Because they need medical attention. And what have you, do you think, you know, what, is that a good policy? And what's the next step? Once they're discharged from the hospital? Where do they go? Then? Do they go back to the street? Or what's what are what is the city planning on doing to make it so that that's, that's a bridge to better a better life for them? Okay, okay. That's it. Thank you.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:22:58

Those are two very good questions. I wonder if Ted, I definitely want to have a chance to hear from you. But our other panelists, if you want to jump in after Ted, if you could just virtually raise your hand, so I know who to call on next. That would be really helpful. But Ted would love to hear your perspective first.

17:23:15

Well, I, whenever you talk about infringing on people's civil rights and involuntary commitment certainly does that you got to be very, very careful. And I think that many of us agree that we need to get people help. You know, if somebody's living on the street for five years, about 80% of people that live that long on the streets, and up debt, and, you know, we got to do something to intervene. And sometimes people's mental illness get in the way that it can't, and, you know, we need to do something about it. But it's not enough just to take them off the street, they need someplace to go. And I think that a real problem for us is that we don't have a lot of places to go.

I mean, back in 1955, New York State had 93,000 inpatient psychiatric beds, those are people that were involuntarily committed. And you know, that there were a lot of tragic things that happened there. And a lot of people have their rights taken away from them that shouldn't have. And we spent a long time in the 70s, and the 60s, talking about how people deserve to live in the community. And we were able to create the supportive housing model to, to make that happen. And a lot of people thought we didn't know what we were talking about when we got started on that. The few pioneers that did that before me, and then those of us that came later in the 1990s. But we're able to show that people with mental illness were able to leave lead really productive lies in the community, and they didn't need to be locked up.

Later on, we were able to show that not only were we providing people with homes that they could thrive in, but we were also saving public money, because we found that the average homeless mentally ill individual living on the streets in New York, where it was costing us about $50,000 a year. And that's 2000, that's 9099 2000 numbers, it's a lot more now it's probably closer to 100,000. But those same individuals, we tracked 5000 of them that were placed into supportive housing. And once they went to supportive housing, they didn't need shelters, they start stopped going to the emergency room for their medical care got hooked up with a primary care doctor, because there was services downstairs in the supportive housing to help them connect and all these other things that came from a stable life and housing, reduce their public costs. And it reduced it so much that it paid for it almost paid for that cost of building the housing, operating the housing and providing services in the housing. When you targeted to people with high medical needs, people living with HIV AIDS, you save 10s of 1000s of dollars. If you place people in this supportive housing and Rob and John have been really good at spreading that message.

I mean, Rob has been particularly effective because he's not only an intellectual, but he's an intellectual with lived experience. And so he has credibility that many people do not and, and is able to actually, you know, talk about the solutions that really do work and supportive housing being one of them, but we're taking way too long to build it. And we really need to address not only the lack of resources going to building and running this kind of housing, but also the various regulatory barriers that are getting in the way of creating it.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:27:14

Yeah, I think all very fair critiques. So I'm doing a quick Time track. We have around five minutes left this our conversation has truly flown by. And I want to make sure that we use these final few minutes to center ourselves in a place of action. After this education, after hopefully the motivation that we're all feeling following this conversation, I want to make sure that all of us have some action items that we can follow up on, taproot will send out a follow up email with the recording of this event and connection opportunities with each of our nonprofit speakers and the resources that they've all spoken to throughout today's conversation. But to close us out, I would love to go around and ask each of our panelists, what is what are one or two things that someone could do a volunteer from the taproot community and a fellow nonprofit of the taproot community? What is a way that we could support your work? Darlene, I would love to hear from you first. Over at Eden shift.

17:28:22

Thank you, um, two things. Right now, I am looking for active board members. I've I love this panel, how it's going on right now. And I want to do more of this panel. But we need to educate, you know, the ones that don't know, you know, so active board members, I can't do this alone. I'm wearing all these hats. And I love Robert hat in New York. I'm in Boston, but raised up in Connecticut. And also, technology. I'm not tech savvy. So once you start learning something, then something else pops up. So anything marketing, social media, and it can be like the simplest thing as posting, you know, anything? So, awareness. Yes. building awareness. So basically active board members, and anything in the technology field. Those are my two main help that I need.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:29:26

Yeah, well, I know, I know, some of the volunteers on the line today. And I can see David Santos sees a great HR expert. I wonder if there's something there around board recruitment tips or strategy. I see some great marketers on the line too. So we're going to share out darlings contact information, and would really encourage folks to get connected there. Rachel, can I jump to you next? What are one or two action items that you can leave people with? How can we support your costs?

17:29:56

So starting early next year, our needs are going to be content marketing and social media. as we restart street rage throughout San Francisco and Silicon Valley,

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:30:15

okay, content marketers if we have any writers on the line if we have any digital marketers on the line, and then of course, social media, always a huge need for organizations. So keep that in mind. We'll share out Rachel's connection details after this. John, heading to you next. What could benefit the Midtown Council?

17:30:39

Well, definitely social media getting message out is always good. I thought I had that off. Yeah, especially social media is always good getting a message out. Right now. We've got so much going on. And we're redrafting our website to make it more people from program focused. And that's what we're working through taproot. We need web designers and also graphics. We've got some forums that I want to put up and it's what's lacking is developing the the marketing for it, I have a graphics person, but she's tied up with a campaign already she's working on me and, and she works a full time job doing the work. And she does, she gives me she works with me separately and she gives me a great price. But and but I can't give her too much or nothing will get done. And so those are kind of key. And then of course we got our programs and committees, we're developing anybody that wants to drive a committee. Anybody wants to really get involved and drive a committee or or, or help with the agendas for the committee and then when the weather gets warmer or garden, you know, we've we've got one farm here and here in the city and like to develop more we got a farm upstate, we've only used a fraction of the acreage there and we brought 775 pounds of food in greens. And that was when we planted late we planted like in in August and this is only September and October harvest and so yeah That's probably where we're developing the fastest and the health committees developing. So, yeah,

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:32:28

When I first spoke to John, he was about to run up to the farm. So local New Yorkers, there's ways for you to get back in person. And there's ways for you to get involved from an infrastructure perspective, too. So we'll share out John's details, Ted would love to hear from

17:32:46

I attended one mscc board meeting and I got three days worth a good salad from John. From the local farming and everything, so urban farming, it's our future here. But But I would say that like, you know, groups like taproot can really help grassroots group like, like Midtown South Community Council and others, in in all sorts of ways, especially people with expertise, I think the important thing for volunteers to keep in mind is to not commit to more than you can deliver to make sure that you're able to meet people's deadlines, because we're nonprofits, we don't want to push too hard. But at the same time, we are businesses and we need, you know, we need to, you know, people are helping us with fundraising or setting up the website and things like that, it's really appreciated, but at the same time, it needs to, you know, be able to get it done and everything. And so, you know, a dedicated volunteer is so invaluable, and we really appreciate what taproot does to connect people like that. That's such, I go, go gone to such a good point. Because, you know, when I work for places, and I was like the buyer strategic get things done, you paid them, they jumped in, they did. But with volunteers, it's they need to have the passion for it and have the time. And it's hard. And that's really, you know, you can't, you can't, you can't expect to treat a volunteer, you shouldn't be able to treat it. Even if they work for you. You shouldn't be treating, never treat anything by badly, but But you have an edge when you pay someone to do a job. Volunteers, you know, you, it's great. It's great that you offer the time, it's wonderful. But you know, you have your lives and things you want to show, John, I mean, like taproot is good because you get so many really skilled people and people with experience. And, you know, that's really, really helpful. And, you know, for certain specific jobs, it's the perfect match, you know, with fundraising, with websites, and all those kinds of things.

17:35:06

Oh, fundraising is always important. Yeah, And I know, we had a fundraiser on the call, they introduce themselves earlier. So hopefully, there's some connection that can happen there. But Ted, you're doing my job for me? Definitely. There's so much value that volunteers can provide to grassroots organizations, and so many of the nonprofit partners that we have at tapper, our grassroots community led organizations, and so I would really encourage folks to take action there.

17:35:39

Yeah, I would say, you know, it's great to have direct services, like, you know, like seeds and even shipped or just, you know, on the front lines doing this stuff is really, you know, that's when people usually think of with volunteering. I think that's really good. But I think also, advocacy organizations like midtown south are also important volunteer opportunities, because, you know, you can change by example, but you can, you also need to agitate and get people to pay attention. And so it's kind of a symbiotic relationship between providing effective direct services, and also advocating and some groups are able to do it both. Some groups do one more than the other. But it's all important. And so I would urge volunteers to, to think about both.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:36:31

Yeah, we need to support the folks on the ground. We also need to support the people who are fighting to address the root causes of, of all of this. I mean, we've talked about it again and again. But this is an incredibly intersectional issue between health and nutrition and mental wellness, and childcare education. There's so much at play here. Rob, I want to close with you. Are there any one or two action items that folks can take in support of the work that you're doing?

17:37:04

Sure, I'll start with just a direct message. 2% Maria, I believe her name is few by his name and say put in the chat. Some information, I think related to New York City, please contact me directly when the information is distributed. We can work on that. together. Kimberly, I think my best work could be done by working directly with Tableau. People call me the connector, right? So I work in legal services, I work in homeless services, I worked on the continuum of care in New York for 13 years. So these various experiences I try to bring people together in coalition's to work together not always easy because I will say this our not for profit world tends to work in silos, right? Because they get foundation grants, let's be real about stuff. You know, Ford Foundation gave me X amount of dollars to do this. That's what I'm focused on. And that can sometimes be problematic.

But I think what we've seen is the good work of coalition's, especially in New York, and as I work around the country and around the world, what coalition's can do so maybe as people's needs come up, I heard a lot number of things, I will tell you folks, I'm embedded in students around the city and around the country, and students seem to gravitate towards me because I have this knowledge of when the ground work, and they look to connect with with movements around the country. So that's another way right? I don't have to do the work, I have to know whether people are good or not, who are knowledgeable about doing the work. And you know, whatever they want from me, if it's a connect direct connect to a community, I give it to them, and then I get production that way. So I think that's a way to go. And these are graduate students that I work mostly with I teach it a graduate program at the new school, but I have strong connections to the CUNY Graduate Center with a bunch of PhD students. So however I can support, you know, I think maybe that's a way that I could support taproot by you know, spreading out around these different issues.

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:38:56

Yeah. Okay, great. I know we're a few minutes over. So I just want to say thank you. Almost everyone stayed on the line, even though we went after our hour mark. And I think that's just a sign of how powerful and educational and motivational all of our panelists were today. So I want to take a moment to just say thank you, to all of our nonprofit speakers. Thanks for giving us your time and your expertise today. And thanks for everyone who joined and, and took an hour of your busy day to sit with us and learn and discuss as a community. taproot will follow up with the recording and lots of links, lots of opportunities to connect with one another, and to really activate one another, as well. So thank you, thank you. Thank you. This was a wonderful conversation, and we appreciate you all. Have a great rest of your day.

17:39:55

Okay, appreciate it.

17:39:56

Thank you, Kimberly, just once. I'll just say this quick once. Kimberly, she has my information that can overwhelm me folks reach out and we can talk folks are asking me in the chat. So

**Kimberly Swartz** 17:40:07

yes, please, please feel free to email connect on LinkedIn. That's what this conversation was supposed to be. It's a starting point for future more in depth conversations and connections. So you're afraid to reach out by everyone.

17:40:25

Thanks so much. Thank you.