

JOHS Provider Conference

June 6, 2025

Notes from Session: Pathways Research Project: Leading with Lived Experience

Presenters:

- Kathleen Conte (she/her) - PSU Homeless Research and Action Collaborative; Presenter
- Cassie Marusa (she/her) - Peer support specialist Cascadia Health Walk in Clinic; Lived Experience Committee Member
- Dylan Franklin (he/him) - Shelter Advocate, Cultivate initiative; Lived Experience Committee Member
- Theodore Hutchinson (he/they) - Lived Experience Committee Member
- Doc Ramblings (he/him) - Homeless Services Department

Moderators: Naomi Kolb-Untinen

Notetaker: Kadi White

-Main Points from Session Overview/Presentation (high level; detail not required):

- “Pathways” project came about through a partnership between JOHS/HSD & Portland State’s Homeless Research and Action Collaborative
 - HSD and PSU had a shared interest about the experiences of folk navigating housing pathways through shelter and housing and gaining a better understanding of how these pathways and people’s housing goals can differ
- The Pathways project is a multi-step and multi-year process investigating:
 - Research Question 1: What supports people while they’re living on the street?
 - Research Question 2: What goals do people have relating to shelter and housing?
 - Research Question 3: What supports/impedes people in working towards those housing and shelter goals ?
 - Research Question 4: How do socio-demographic factors influence or change how people's’ needs, priorities, goals (i.e. responses to previous questions)

- Research Question 5: What do “pathways” through homelessness look like?
- As part of the project, a Lived Experience Committee with 17 members was formed
 - The committee takes an active role in each step of the project, including co-designing the research, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and collaborating on next steps
- Three part study
 - 1: Set up Transformational Research for Equity and Experience (TREES) Committee (2024-2026)
 - This is the Lived Experience Committee
 - 2: Survey (Spring 2025)
 - Plan to survey people who are unsheltered, sheltered, and recently housed
 - Plan to survey 400 people with experience with current homeless system in Multnomah County
 - The survey takes about 30-40 minutes to complete
 - Currently at this stage of the process
 - So far have surveyed people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
 - Plan to survey more people in shelter and those who are recently housed
 - Partnered with ambassadors from street outreach programs and Lived Experience Committee members to conduct surveys
 - 3: Interviews and mapping (Summer 2025)
 - Purpose: Explore “what pathways through homelessness” look like to improve services, offer hope, share experience.
 - Develop individual maps & potentially community level maps
 - Possible community workshops and mapping
- Preliminary Data
 - 300 responses collected from 14 sites (day space/unsheltered, pod/villages, street outreach, etc.)
 - There is diversity in places where people are staying with the majority of respondents outside or in tents
 - 80% of respondents shared they had to change where they were living or sleeping 10 or more times
 - 73% of respondents shared where they were staying was “swept”
 - Resources
 - Majority of respondent used and found the following helpful

- Rent assistance
 - The majority of those who have access found it helpful
 - However a lot of people don't have access to rent assistance
- Personal care (laundry, charge electronics, internet access, food access, etc.)
 - A lot of people are getting access and finding it useful
- Respondents shared they want more help with the following
 - Access to peer support, specialists, and case workers
 - Consistent case management
 - Finding a job
 - Support for pets
- Role of Lived Experience Committee (LEC)
 - Diverse group of people with lived experience of homelessness (including experience with the criminal justice system, living on the streets, staying in vehicles)
 - Committee meets monthly meetings in person with a hybrid option
 - Each meeting includes relationship building (sharing a meal, icebreakers, etc.)
 - Each member has an opportunity to lead the ice breaker
 - The PSU Research Lead helps provide the framework for the meeting with the focus and the Committee members lead the discussion within the agenda (including providing feedback and suggested updates to the research process or survey) and collaborates on next steps
 - The LEC critiqued the survey questions and provided suggestions for updates and provided suggestions on where to disseminate the survey
 - The Research Lead also provides training to support Committee members in strengthening research and data analysis skills. PSU empowers LEC members to take an active role in the project and its design and development
 - LEC members who helped disseminate the survey shared positive experiences
 - Those who agreed to complete the survey felt more comfortable opening up to the LEC members once they learned that they have similar experiences to them
 - Provides a great opportunity to connect with people

- Since the LEC members have the lived experience, they are able to ask follow up questions that adds to the quality of the research
 - People who take the survey felt energized afterward because they felt like they had a voice and were listened to
- JOHS/HSD invested in this project and Lived Experience Committee, independent of HSD and led by PSU and the LEC members, to provide expertise beyond the current capacity of JOHS/HSD
 - PSU & LEC aims to use survey data to identify and guide new projects, extending beyond the initial research
- Potential future plans
 - Investigating the resources for each stage of someone's pathway, including after they are housed
 - Exploring workforce development programs (and potentially ones that incorporate housing accommodation)
 - Further investigate the difference between the accessibility of resources and the less accessible resources that are rated as highly useful

-Questions/Answers (summarization):

- Is there a plan at the government level for using the data gathered in this project to inform policies or change systems?
 - It's still early in the process. However, leadership at JOHS/HSD is invested and excited for the results of the survey and the plan is to use the data to inform policy and programming decisions and improve systems
 - PSU owns the data and can use it beyond government purposes, including collaborating with community organizations for advocacy and informing service updates at survey sites.
 - There is an option to repeat the survey annually.
- Do you know of similar Lived Experience Committees and if they've successfully implemented changes within the community (including related to policy change)?
 - California conducted a large study of people experiencing homelessness that included a lived experience committee
 - Don't know what committee is doing and what part they played in research
 - There are lived experience projects in Seattle that have informed programming
 - JOHS recently reprogrammed some shelter models based on the research and community input
 - The research will provide a deeper understanding
 - There are a lot of lived experiences committees on the program side of work and less

- Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) in Denver
 - Grassroots lived experience project
 - WRAP also does work in Bay Area and the Stop the Sweeps group
 - Has successfully impacted policy in Denver
- What is the most surprising thing you've learned through this project?
 - Thought that people would be more in tents, a lot more outside
 - There is a lot of intersectionality between committee members and it's a group of people that have a frame of reference for what you're discussing
 - The perception of those experiencing homelessness is not accurate; the people they surveyed were very polite and nice to connect with
- How many people who completed surveys are struggling with mental health issues?
 - They are still analyzing data, though so far, a large proportion of respondents were struggling with mental health
 - Missing two important pops - people in shelter and people recently housed (working on that in the coming months)
 - Lived experience committee
 - When you enfranchise the community you serve and
 - Hope to get into mental health providers as part of the survey
- Question to room: What's the most important thing to preserve/invest in to end homelessness?
 - Invest in youth and education
 - DV
 - Substance abuse
 - PSH
 - Housing and workforce development
 - Access to resources
 - Outreach
- What did the investment look like to provide incentive for survey and how did you decide what to provide?
 - Planned the incentive amount in 2023 and unfortunately couldn't change it when they started disseminating the survey in 2025
 - Participants are given a \$10 gift card
 - Overall, participants felt like the gift card was a bonus and they enjoyed having their voices heard and built connections
 - They were also able to provide personal care items and snacks PSU School of Public Health
- If I'm interested in joining the LEC, is there a way to do that?
 - The committee is a paid position and they are current at capacity

- Kathleen and PSU are happy to connect with folx to help with future research work such as helping with the survey or community mapping
- People who are interested in helping with the research can get in touch Kathleen Conte (kconte@pdx.edu) or reach out through the project email (hracpathways@psx.edu)
- People have misconceptions about connections between homelessness, crime, and drugs. Does the data clarify this misconception?
 - This will be investigated through the data analysis
 - Data can be categorized by diverse experiences, pathways, and identities.
 - Significant emphasis will be placed on preserving data complexity and maintaining adaptability for varying needs
- Correlation between data collected here and HRAP 2.0?
 - The HRAP metrics and goals are currently being reviewed and revised and it's slated to complete later this Fall
 - The data collection and analysis for the Pathways project is happening concurrently with the updates the HRAP and the data will help inform the changes in the HRAP
 - There's also an HRAP session today that provides the opportunity to provide input

-Main Discussion Points not captured above:

- N/A

-Takeaways or Follow-Ups for JOHS (expectations/ priorities/ recommendations/etc):

- The "Pathways" project is a collaborative research effort between JOHS/HSD and Portland State University's Homeless Research and Action Collaborative focused on understanding the experiences of people navigating housing pathways through shelter and housing.
 - The project involves a multi-step and multi-year process addressing key research questions about supports for unsheltered individuals, their housing goals, and barriers they face.
 - A Lived Experience Committee (LEC) of 17 members plays an active role in all stages of the project, including research design, data collection, analysis, and planning.
- Preliminary survey data includes 300 responses from 14 sites, revealing that many respondents have moved frequently, experienced "sweeps," and found resources like rent assistance and access to personal care items helpful. The LEC members shared that respondents appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences and feel heard.

- Respondents expressed a desire for increased access to peer support and consistent case management, and support with employment.
- JOHS/HSD aims to use the data to inform policy, programming, and updates to the HRAP 2.0. PSU can use the data for broader advocacy and partnership with community agencies.
- Potential future plans include investigating resources for each stage of someone's housing pathway, exploring workforce development programs, and further investigating resource accessibility and usefulness.
- The data analysis will investigate misconceptions about the connections between homelessness, crime, and drugs and the correlation between the data collected here and HRAP 2.0.