The WNET Group presents
CLOSE TO HOME: Town Halls on Housing Equality
April 26-May 24, 2023
thirteen.org/CloseToHome

BIOS/Week 3 of 5
MORE THAN SHELTER: A Town Hall about Homelessness and Community
Wednesday, May 10 | 6:00-7:30 pm EST


PANELISTS

SHARON LEE is the founding executive director of the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a nonprofit housing organization based in Seattle. Under her leadership, LIHI has developed more than 4,500 units of affordable housing in Washington state, including transitional, permanent, and housing first. Lee is a national leader on solutions to homelessness, including Urban Rest Stops that meet the hygiene needs of homeless people and Tiny House Villages that quickly move people from sleeping on sidewalks and in tents into private shelter that provides security, stability, and the resources to move out of homelessness. Lee is a frequent guest lecturer, speaker, and panelist on housing justice, housing preservation, and ending homelessness. She holds a Master of Architecture and a Master of City Planning from M.I.T. and a B.A. with honors from the University of Pennsylvania. lihihousing.org

IMAM OMAR NIASS was born in Senegal. The son of an Imam, he studied and then taught the Qur’an as a youth. He moved to the U.S. in the 2000’s, serving several mosques in New York and working odd jobs to make a living. In 2009, in the Bronx, he opened a deli grocery which he still operates today. Those earnings allowed him to rent a three-room apartment which he also made into a house of worship. The mosque attracted a steady stream of visitors, often in need of a place to stay. In 2014, Imam Omar noticed more African migrants seeking shelter. He took them in to live with him in the apartment, as he worked toward buying a larger space where he could help more people. He met that goal in 2015. Today, the Jamhiyatu Ansaru-Deen mosque in the Bronx provides humanitarian assistance, transitional shelter, and community for dozens and sometimes hundreds of mostly African immigrants and asylum seekers fleeing poverty, war, humanitarian crises, and economic upheaval. “This is a house for Allah,” Imam Omar says. “Everybody is welcome.” [Adapted from the article, "This Mosque is A Refuge for Migrants and Asylum Seekers in the Bronx,” by Fisayo Okare and Ralph Thomassaint Joseph, for Documented, Feb 27, 2023]

SHERI RIEMERS (White Earth Nation of Ojibwe) is the executive director of Ain Dah Yung (Our Home) Center, which provides a healing place within the community for American Indian youth and families to thrive in safety and wholeness. Sheri has more than 34 years of experience in program development, management and community outreach involving social services and culture revitalization in community-based services creating innovative, nationally recognized models within the American Indian community. She is a dedicated member of numerous boards and advisories that advocate and foster change to positively impact American Indian youth and families affected by historical trauma. Her years of dedication, visionary leadership, executive oversight, and experience allow her to navigate complex systems and advocate system change that impact our community today. adycenter.org
ALEXANDER ROQUE is president and executive director of the All Forney Center, the nation’s largest and most comprehensive organization dedicated to homeless LGBTQ+ youth. Recruited to AFC in 2011 to launch the agency’s first in-house Development Department, Alex has more than tripled the organization’s budget, increased its capacity, and introduced robust programs that bolster its work. He has more than 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, having led community development, business development, fundraising, and communications for numerous organizations. Prior to joining AFC, Alex mobilized national field fundraising for a health charity, led programs for youth in foster care, and worked with the Center for Anti-Violence Education. In 2018, he was appointed to the board of Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation, supporting mental health initiatives for young people around the globe. allforneycenter.org

DONALD H. WHITEHEAD, JR. is the executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, where he is serving his second term as the organization’s leader. He is also a co-founder of Racial Equity Partners. Donald has worked on homelessness, recovery, and racial equity for more than 25 years, in roles ranging from outreach worker to executive director. He has served on advisory committees for Presidents Bush, Clinton, Bush II, and Obama. In 2005, Donald received a distinguished service award for his work on homelessness from the Congressional Black Caucus. He received a second award of Special Recognition from Congress in 2008. In 2011, he received the 2020 customer service award from the State of Maryland for his efforts to move 200 street homeless individuals off the streets and into non-congregate facilities during COVID-19. Donald was recently appointed to the Advisory Committee on Veteran Homeless to the Secretary of Veteran Affairs. nationalhomeless.org

MODERATOR

ANTHONINE PIERRE is a dynamic community organizer, putting her problem-solving skills to work on everything from building Black power in a gentrifying neighborhood to ending sexualized street harassment in Central Brooklyn. She centers collective liberation and a commitment to personal sustainability in her leadership. As the executive director of the Brooklyn Movement Center (BMC), Anthonine provides strategic leadership and daily management of the organization’s organizing, operations and communications efforts. Her organizing career dates back to her youth organizing start at Brooklyn Technical High School and with the Prospect Park Alliance Youth Council. Anthonine has also held positions at the Children’s Defense Fund, the Manhattan Borough President’s Office and the Advocacy Institute. When she’s not trying to move dope people together towards the Black Future, you can find her biking around her native Flatbush with her husband, Jeffrey. brooklynmovementcenter.org

OPENING PERFORMANCE

Violinist KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS is blazing an innovative, entrepreneurial career as a soloist and chamber musician. Acclaimed as “the versatile violinist who makes the music come alive” and a 2017 “New Yorker of the Year” by the New York Times, and for her “tonal mastery” by BBC Music Magazine, her achievements include a Naumburg International Violin Competition Honorarium Prize, a Concert Artists Guild Career Grant, and a Sphinx Medal of Excellence. Hall-Tomkins has appeared as soloist and is the Inaugural Artist in Residence with the Cincinnati Symphony, and performed with the Dallas Symphony, Oakland Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Tulsa Philharmonic, Greenville Symphony, Chamber Orchestra of New York, and other orchestras. She has performed in Kiev, Ukraine, Washington, DC, Cleveland, Toronto, Chicago, and Baltimore, and at festivals in France, Germany, and Italy. A dedicated humanitarian, Ms. Hall-Tomkins founded and directs Music Kitchen-Food for the Soul, which has brought more than 100 chamber music performances to homeless shelters in New York City, Los Angeles, Paris, and other cities, presenting an estimated 18,000 people with music by nearly 200 artists. Music Kitchen’s newly commissioned song cycle, Forgotten Voices, premiered recently at Carnegie Hall. kellyhall-tomkins.com | musickitchennyc.org

Presented By The WNET Group
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