



## TENANTS FIRST ADVISORY PANEL

“OUR HOUSING, OUR VOICES”

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



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# Why a Tenants First Advisory Panel?



## City Council Direction:

In July 2016, City Council adopted the Tenants First report which identified a way forward to address the recommendations made by the Mayor's Task Force on Toronto Community Housing (TCHC). The Tenants First report recommended that the City develop an implementation plan and strike a TCHC Resident Advisory Panel to help guide the implementation of the plan.

More than 220 Toronto Community Housing tenants applied to participate as a member of the Advisory Panel. Thirteen tenants representing a broad range of geographic and demographic diversity, as well as knowledge, expertise, and community interests were selected to be members of the Panel.

# About the advisory panel



## Our Housing, Our Voices

As panel members, we contributed our lived experiences, knowledge, skills, and interests to provide guidance and advice to the staff team on the development of the Tenants First Phase 1 Implementation Plan.

Through weekly meetings, workshops, and information sessions, we learned more about the key issues facing Toronto Community

Housing and shared our thoughts, ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to bring positive change for the tenants living in TCHC.

In addition to our weekly meetings, our members participated on Social Planning Toronto's Housing Policy Forum series. We also represented tenants to the media through Metro Morning and in news articles, and coordinated and



***“My first goal was to challenge the tokenism so prevalent in so many “selected” panels. Second, I wanted to act for those residents who are tired of having no representation, or of having tenants whose motivations are self-serving be accepted as the voice of the majority. Third, I am critical of austerity moves to privatization and of revitalization projects that remove the poor, and I’m not afraid to say that I want the city to remain responsible for providing affordable housing.”***

***- Doris Power***



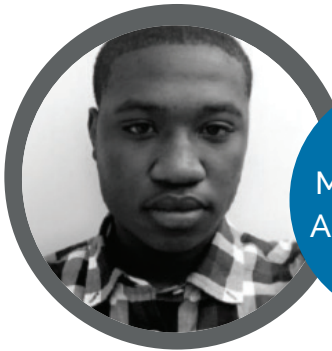
co-facilitated 4 City-wide tenant meetings, to inform our communities about the Tenants First Implementation Plan.

We believe we helped to bring a strong tenant voice to the work of Tenants First - this report reflects our voices, as members of the Tenants First Advisory Panel.

***“The civic engagement process is a very important piece of the future mandate in the TCHC. It was by far my favourite part, because I believe community engagement creates a sense of unity between neighbours and communities.”***

***- Deqa Nur***

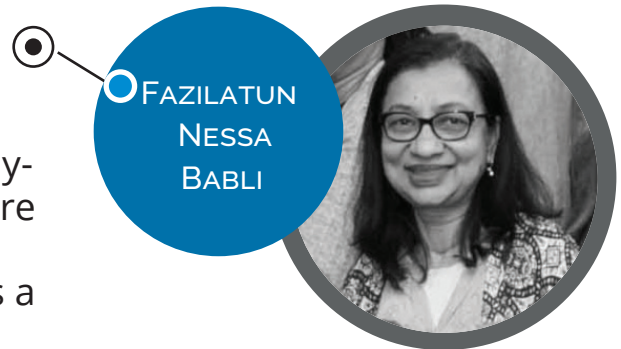
# Who are our members



MICHAEL  
ACHEAMPONG

Michael is a young person committed to participating in the decision-making processes that impact him. Volunteering with local youth inspired Michael to become engaged in community building activities, and he now works with his own neighbourhood group.

Nessa brings an extensive background in community activism to the Advisory Panel. She is a resident of the Kingston Galloway-Orton Park neighbourhood, where she is a community organizer, advocate for social justice, and is a Board member to many organizations.



FAZILATUN  
NESSA  
BABLI



JOHN  
CORSO

John has been a TCHC tenant for 19 years. He is passionate about social and food justice, urban planning, public health, community organizing on community food projects, and builds awareness of food justice issues.

As a senior living in TCHC, Alan brings a wealth of experience to the panel. Alan is currently an elected Tenant Representative and Co-Chair of Seniors Voice and advocated for the creation of the Office of the Commissioner of Housing Equity.

ALAN  
DUDDIN



SHARON  
FOLKES -  
HALL

Sharon is a 4th year social work student with a belief in working for the equality for all people on issues of poverty and sustainable housing and has a range of volunteer experience with community organizations and groups.

Deqa Nur is an activist, community leader, and York University student in International Development Studies. She advocates for better building infrastructure and sustainable development through organizing public forums and awareness campaigns on issues impacting Toronto communities.

DEQA  
NUR



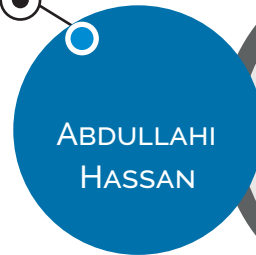
# Who are our members (cont'd)



KISA  
HAMILTON

Kisa is a community activist and a resident of TCHC for over 20 years. She engages residents at the grassroots level on initiatives that impact her communities. Kisa has led and co-hosted public forums, awareness campaigns and is a Board member of many community organizations.

Abdullahi is a new tenant to TCHC, living in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood with a background in community recreation, and has worked with many community groups to shape the future of the non-profit housing sector.



Augustre has been a resident of Scarborough and an active TCHC tenant for about 30 years. Her long history as an advocate of social housing tenants includes the Metro Toronto Housing Authority, and the City-wide Tenant Engagement Reference Committee.



AUGUSTRE  
MUNRO





INGRID  
PALMER

Ingrid is a public speaker and has lived in TCHC for over 30 years and volunteers in the special needs, education, and community sectors. She is passionate about building empowerment and resiliency through engagement and participatory decision-making.

Doris continues her long history of activism as a member of the City of Toronto Seniors Forum, various disability organizations, and the Law Union of Ontario. Doris is a pioneer in the struggle for social justice, equality, and female leadership.

DORIS  
POWER



KARLENE  
STEER

Karlene has extensive lived experience of the challenges faced by families living in social housing. For more than 15 years, she has worked for positive change on behalf of tenants living in social housing.

Katelyn coordinates the Junior Youth Empowerment Program in four TCHC communities. She strongly believes that to build a vibrant and unified force, all the members of the community have to be involved and active contributors to initiatives and programs.

KATELYN  
WALLACE



# Our advice moving forward

***"We are the only G8 nation without a national housing strategy. A peoples' most basic need for survival is housing. The World Health Organization recognizes that housing is a prime health determinant. There are countries who recognize housing as a human right.***

***We must speak out to remind us all that Housing IS a Right."  
- Doris Power***



**#1**

IMPROVING  
TORONTO  
COMMUNITY  
HOUSING

**#2**

A NEW SENIORS  
HOUSING  
PROVIDER

***“Tenants have been fighting for change for a long time. We have been on so many Committees and meetings and we are not seeing things done. Tenants get let down. We have a lot of hope in Tenants First. We need to see something come out of this.”***

***- Karlene Steer***

***“ We, the tenants of Toronto Community Housing would like to live with dignity and respect in places of safety and comfort. I hope all of our honourable City Councillors will consider our situation.”***

***- Fazilatun Nessa Babli***



**#3**

**BETTER FUNDING  
FOR TORONTO  
COMMUNITY  
HOUSING**

**#4**

**A BETTER  
HOUSING SYSTEM  
FOR TENANTS**

**#5**

**ENGAGING  
WITH  
TENANTS**

# #1 Improving TCHC

***“The top priority should be providing high quality affordable housing to tenants, this in turn will make communities safer. However, community safety is connected to other priorities including youth programs and services, and supports to children and families - these also promote safer communities.”***

***- Kisa Hamilton***







The core role of Toronto Community Housing should be to provide quality housing that is safe and clean - providing safe housing should be a top priority.



The new TCHC should have a mandate to look at ways of directing and connecting tenants to services. TCHC is NOT an employment agency but does have the power and connections to work with others to ensure economic opportunities for its tenants.



Tenants deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, like any other resident of Toronto who live in non-TCHC buildings - improving customer service to tenants should be a priority for all levels of the organization.



We want Toronto Community Housing to be an efficient and responsible landlord.

***“We all want an efficient and responsible landlord that provides quality and safe living conditions, collects the rent, and maintains the property. But we also support looking at new and innovative ways of providing housing to tenants in TCHC who need support ”***

***- Ingrid Palmer***

#2

## A New Seniors Housing Provider

***"I put forth my name to the Tenants First Panel because I believe that to effect change one must become educated and knowledgeable. As a senior, I am interested in learning about the needs of our seniors and helping support changes to improve their lived experiences in TCHC."***

***- Alan Duddin***



We support a dedicated seniors housing provider. We see many positive opportunities with a housing provider that focuses on providing specialized services for seniors. A seniors housing provider could bring opportunities to attract more senior specific funding.



There are positive benefits for a stronger City role in delivering housing services to seniors - City oversight and accountability; improving the holistic health of seniors by collaborating with other City divisions such as Toronto Public Health and Parks, Forest & Recreation for better services and programs.



The new seniors housing provider should deliver housing that is not institutional, but vibrant, creative, innovative and flexible. Governance is important, but the service delivery model is equally important.



We need to consider the program and service needs of seniors who will remain in mixed Toronto Community Housing buildings. Seniors need to have equal access to services whether they are in the new seniors housing or with TCHC.



We also need to provide opportunities for inter-generational connections through housing service provision.

***“We need to have a thoughtful plan to engage with seniors through the transition process because many seniors face barriers to engagement such as literacy, language, lack of internet access and/or physical limitations.”***

***- Abdullahi Hassan***

#3

## Better Funding For TCHC

***“TCHC and the social housing sector need long-term sustainable funding and the current model is broken. Long-term funding is critical to the maintenance, repair and operation of our buildings. Without this commitment from all levels of government I fear that the quality of life for our residents, and the most vulnerable residents in Toronto, will continue to deteriorate.”***

***- John Corso***



We support a new funding model for TCHC - both for the day-to-day operating of our housing, and funding is also needed for the capital repairs that are critically needed - the larger issues don't get resolved unless there is a crisis or political pressure.



TCHC has suffered instability for years and needs a stable framework which requires that the Provincial and Federal governments return to their financial partnerships.





The current waiting list for Rent Geared to Income (RGI) housing in Toronto is unacceptable, we should not be closing ANY social housing units due to lack of funding to do repairs or upgrades.



Utility costs are increasing - we should consider programs and initiatives to make units more energy efficient for cost savings.



TCHC is not adequately funded to deliver services; partnerships should be considered or through the Ministries.

***“We are now starting to see the effects of long term neglect and disinvestment in the social housing sector, particularly in TCHC. It is shameful that the federal and provincial governments sit by and watch our buildings crumble and our communities suffer, they need to pay their fair share.”***

***- John Corso***

#4

# A Better Housing System for Tenants

*"A priority that needs to be addressed is the interactions and communication that take place between staff and residents, because I feel the only way people will enjoy where they are working and living is through building positive communities together."*

*- Katelyn Wallace*



## 4.1 Decentralization



We strongly support a less institutional, hierarchical, and more community based housing services model. You need to be able to go into the office and know the staff like we used to with Metro Toronto Housing Authority and Cityhome.



Staff and tenants need to listen to each other and value must be given to lived experience as well as expertise. Tenants are claiming the role of shareholder and a shared vision can create positive and sustainable social housing.



Tenant engagement and community development can help build strong and healthy communities. We want opportunities to be engaged in our communities through meaningful leadership roles.



Community use of space needs to be available and tenants empowered to use it for community development.



Local information offices or hubs would be useful.

***“Supporting vulnerable tenants, means contextualizing and linking the macro and micro social, economic and political connections.”***

***- Sharon Folkes-Hall***

#4

## A Better Housing System for Tenants

***“Support vulnerable tenants who are living in Toronto Community Housing by doing residents check-ups through home visits to their doors if they are unable to attend resident meetings on a once every other week basis. Or, if not, be able to carry out these resident meetings for these individuals to share their concerns or ways to assist them.”***  
- Katelyn Wallace





## 4.2 Supporting tenants



We support looking at new and innovative ways of providing housing to tenants in TCHC who need supportive housing. There are some community based housing providers who provide high quality housing with needed supports.



TCHC should be providing services to vulnerable tenants using a stronger partnership and coalition based lens.



Programs and services are not equitably delivered in all communities. Partnerships are needed with external providers to make sure they are available to ALL tenants.



Adequate services and supports for vulnerable and marginalized tenants are critical to the health and well-being of our communities. We need the expertise of special supportive agencies to meet the needs of vulnerable tenants.



TCHC should continue to work with groups such as Responsible Personal Accessibility in Toronto Housing (RPATH), to address accessibility issues and advocate for the elimination of barriers faced by tenants in TCHC.

***“The most important issue for me is to ensure vulnerable tenants have the supports they need. No one should have to be afraid to ask for help.”***

***- John Corso***

#4

# A Better Housing System for Tenants

*“New approaches to the TCHC mandate must speak to the call for social action and away from the rhetoric of re-arranging policies and practices.”*

*- Sharon Folkes-Hall*



## 4.3 Advocacy for change



The city must step-up to build more affordable housing to address the unacceptable number of people on the waiting list for housing. We can't afford to be closing any more TCHC units - these are people's homes and communities.



We need a commitment from all levels of government to address our living conditions.



We need changes to the Rent Geared to Income (RGI) system and how rent is calculated. There are differences in assessing income. Some pay different levels of utility costs and this has a huge impact on overall shelter costs. The system needs to be more easily understood. Too many tenants are treated differently.

***“City bylaws and policies must support people’s immediate needs and not create barriers that will hinder a person’s ability to be productive. Allow people to have autonomy in choosing housing locations that best fit their living, and provides required stability”***

***- Sharon Folkes-Hall***

# #4

## A Better Housing System for Tenants

***“Scattered housing provides the ideal environment for inclusion. In this type of integrated social housing, economic divides and access to certain opportunities are somewhat mitigated and therefore diminish some of the barriers commonly faced by tenants.”***

***- Doris Power***



## 4.4 Keeping and improving single family homes



We feel strongly that the single family homes are an important part of the Rent Geared to Income (RGI) housing stock in the TCHC portfolio and must be maintained and improved.



The single family homes provide housing for low income tenants that is well integrated into their surrounding neighbourhoods.



Operating and maintaining the single family homes has been a low priority for Toronto Community Housing.



We support a model such as a community based non-profit, a co-op, or a community land trust that can provide innovative ways to maintain and operate the single family homes and engage with tenants in the process.

***“Tenants want to be included in their communities and not seen as ‘other than’. That is the beauty of scattered housing, where you are completely embedded, but for other communities there remains a social stigma of living in government housing that is a huge barrier and difficult challenge to surmount”***

***- Ingrid Palmer***



# #5

## Engaging with Tenants

***"I have long been a believer in a permanent advisory council. I think that all organizations would work better if they listened to their front-line workers, their clients, and service users."***

***- Doris Power***



Remove the barriers and challenges of tenant engagement that currently exist - a new model is needed. The role of Tenant Directors on the Board must be valued and respected.



The City of Toronto should continue to engage with tenants through the implementation of the Tenants First Plan. The Tenants First Advisory Panel should be maintained, and membership could be alternated.



Tenants don't have a mechanism for input into housing policy. We want to be included in those discussions. Tenants want an inclusive and safe platform for their voices.



We want to be engaged as tenants to determine which services and programs are in our communities.

**“Moving forward, including tenants as equal stakeholders will be a transformative process. While we have been invited to participate in the past, we have yet to realize true equity, respect, and value in the process. When tenants are truly valued and accepted as partners, our ideas and solutions will result in mutually determined and beneficial outcomes.”**  
 - Ingrid Palmer

#1. What would make TCHC a better place to live for youth?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lower Rent</li> <li>- <del>Lower</del> gang Violence</li> <li>- Youth Programs Funding</li> <li>- Youth perspective created programs<br/>↳ getting to youth on social media</li> <li>- Centres in communities to create own programming with supports.</li> <li>- Percentage of youth rent exempted when they reach Adulthood.</li> <li>↳ Trainings</li> <li>- Don't feel safe with police presence in communities</li> <li>- Youth housing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increased focus on trans housing → More thoughtful Process for housing list.</li> <li>- Stop Fighting!</li> <li>- Following through you with youth commitments<br/>↳ more in to on systems</li> <li>- Mentorship programs<br/>↳ former resident that have moved on.</li> <li>- Education! ↳ of what residents have access to</li> <li>- Feels like TCHC does not listen → has a history of not listening<br/>↳ doing a better job of it but still not there yet.</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

***“The stereotypes of our community are shattered by the members of the Tenants First Advisory Panel. We are intelligent, we are hard-working, we care, we communicate, we work together, and we respect one another.***

***Tenants must continue to be involved, to give input, to participate, in order to keep the work relevant and important. Things are not perfect, but they can only get better with our involvement. Establishing trust is critical. Remember that just because you are struggling, doesn't mean you are failing”***

***- Ingrid Palmer***

# Get in touch

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