

Full Circle Leadership

Leading With Purpose

SPOTLIGHTING LIVED EXPERTISE IN HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH EQUITY

Changing the World After Survival

ISSUE
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From the Editor

Every person in this series survived things that were designed to break them. Homelessness. Addiction. Displacement, Etc. Systems that took their labor and left them out of the room.

And then they built something. This series is about what happens after survival: the turnaround, the rebuilding, and the leadership that grows out of knowing a problem from the inside.

The people featured here are not case studies. They are architects, founders, and chairs.

This issue features Mrs. Kennetha Patterson of Nashville, Tennessee, and Hussein Ugas of Federal Way, Washington.

Amanda J. Richer, Editor.

> *"Survival was the beginning. Leadership is how we change what comes next."*

I Am Doing a Great Work and I Cannot Come Down

Mrs. Kennetha Patterson, The Homeless CEO, Nashville, TN



> "Lived expertise is not a story, it is a profession. It is time for the world to stop extracting from lived-expert leaders and start compensating, elevating, and protecting them."

THE SURVIVAL: Mrs. Kennetha Patterson has survived homelessness four times, raising a family of seven through displacement, institutional harm, and decades of suicidality that began at eight years old. At thirty-nine she refused that path, a moment she calls cosmic, a spiritual alignment that redirected her life toward purpose and advocacy.

THE TURNAROUND: "My lived experience is not a footnote; it is a methodology." That methodology became Heartwork From Harm, her trauma-responsive framework that turns lived harm into community healing, public health strategy, and structural advocacy. Today she is the historic first Lived-Expert Chair of Nashville's Homeless Planning Council (2024 to 2025); Chair of the HUD CoC Lived Expertise Leadership Committee; Co-Chair of Meharry Medical College's Community Engagement Core; a Buckminster Fuller Institute Design Science Studio Global Fellow; a 2026 NLIHC Lorraine Brown Resident Leader Award recipient; co-founder of the Nashville Voices of Resilience Homeless Choir, the first in Music City; and author of two forthcoming books.

THE COST: Burnout, financial instability, and uncompensated governance labor. Rather than quit, she and her peers started a choir, and when Metro Arts invested in them they exceeded every expectation.

THE RIPPLE: People with lived experience stepping into leadership, securing jobs, building cooperatives, becoming "ARTivists."

Support: PayPal @TheHomelessCEO01, Venmo @KPeezy83, sponsor the Homeless Choir.

No One Should Have to Find Their Way Back Alone

Hussein Ugas, Founder & Executive Director, Rahma Recovery Center, Federal Way, WA.



WHAT HE BUILT

- Salaam House (men) and House of Du'a (women), WAQRR-accredited Level II recovery residences
- 30+ people housed in recovery
- 500+ reached with Narcan and overdose education
- 20+ families supported
- Rahma Recovery Farm
- South King County Recovery Cafe coming.

THE SURVIVAL: For more than a decade Hussein lived with addiction, mental health challenges, homelessness, and justice-system involvement, and knew how hard it is to ask for help when addiction carries deep stigma in immigrant, African, and Muslim communities. "Recovery gave me another opportunity at life."

THE TURNAROUND: "I couldn't just keep talking about the gap. I had to help build something to fill it." That became Rahma Recovery Center, built so no one has to abandon their culture, faith, identity, or dignity to get well.

THE COST: He left a stable career as a truck driver and traded financial security for uncertainty. "The cost has been real, but so has the purpose."

THE RIPPLE: Residents reconnecting with family, returning to school, finding work, and helping others.

> *"Meet people where they are, but never stop believing in where they can go."*

Support: rahmarecoverycenter.org/donate.php

The Thread Between Them

Two cities, two very different roads, one shared conclusion: the people closest to the problem are the ones best equipped to solve it. Kennetha calls it a methodology. Hussein calls it leadership. Both refused to let survival be the end of the story.

Know someone changing the world after survival?

Contact to nominate them for a future issue.

Edited by Amanda J. Richer. Stories shared with permission, in the words of the people who lived them.

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