

Full Circle Leadership

Leading With Purpose

SPOTLIGHTING LIVED EXPERTISE IN HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH EQUITY

Changing the World After Survival

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From the Editor

Last month this series began with a simple idea: survival is where the work starts, and after is where the persistence, dedication, and knowledge continue it. This month, Hanoi "Cici" Rojas Pérez asks the next question: who gets paid for that work?

Cici has proved that survivors have worth and skills outside of their trauma. People with lived experience are asked for their stories all the time, and too often for free. Cici changed that. She won the first paid Consumer Advisory Board Liaison role, then helped take Wynwood North from the ground up into permanent supportive housing.

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

This issue features Hanoi "Cici" Rojas Pérez of Miami, Florida.

Amanda J. Richer, Editor.

> *Survival was part of the story. The fortitude to lift others up as well is the legacy.*

Lived Experience Is Expertise. Expertise Has Value.

Hanoi “Cici” Rojas Pérez, Recovery Success, Miami, FL



> “Do not underestimate people because of what they have survived. A person's hardest chapter is not necessarily their final chapter.”

THE SURVIVAL: Cici Rojas Pérez has lived through significant transitions, displacement, and loss, and rebuilt her life from the ground up. She knows firsthand how hard it is to navigate systems that are difficult to understand and even harder to access. Lived experience, she says, “is a form of knowledge and expertise.”

THE TURNAROUND: She saw that “many systems are designed for people without necessarily being designed with them. I wanted to help change that.” That led her into peer support, advocacy, program development, and community leadership. She served as Vice Chair and Chair of a Consumer Advisory Board and as Southeast Regional Representative with the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, and helped establish and lead a lived-experience working group connected to the Homeless Trust.

THE COST: Professional disappointments, financial sacrifices, and emotional exhaustion. “There is a cost to sharing your story.” She kept moving forward anyway.

THE RIPPLE: People more willing to speak because they are heard, and lived experts recognized as professionals, not unpaid advisors.

Her principle: lived experience deserves recognition, respect, and compensation.

Not Just a Story. A Seat at the Table.

Hanoi "Cici" Rojas Pérez, on turning what she lived into what she built.



WHAT SHE BUILT

- Wynwood North, permanent supportive housing for adults 55+ and people with disabilities
- First paid Consumer Advisory Board Liaison role
- Lived-experience working group with the Homeless Trust
- Consumer Advisory Board leadership
- Peer support and training
- Southeast Regional Representative, NHCHC

THE FIRST: She advocated for and won the role of first paid Consumer Advisory Board Liaison, with a monthly stipend. It established that lived experience could, and should, be compensated.

THE HOUSING: As Project Manager for Wynwood North, she and her team took permanent supportive housing from the ground up: the building, the contract, and the funding.

THE LESSON: "Creating something meaningful requires more than passion." It takes persistence, organization, and relationship-building.

THE LEGACY: "They can be professionals. They can be leaders."

> *"My past does not have to define my ability to change the future"*

From expertise to opportunity to change.

The Common Thread

One principle runs through everything Cici has built: lived experience is actually expertise in a subject that society has struggled to understand for centuries. “What you survived can become part of the reason someone else survives, succeeds, finds housing, finds connection, or finds HOPE.”

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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