

Youth Voices & The Right to Housing Takeaways

We conducted a focus group session with students and teachers mostly from Hillside New Tech. A few students attended from Durham Tech and other area schools. We presented data on the impact of COVID-19 and the loss of income and housing on communities in Durham. We shared information about the evictions process prior to and during the pandemic. The students shared and discussed their reflections and solutions. The facilitators wrote up notes following the session, reviewed the recorded chat notes, full session transcript, and pulled key quotes to organize the takeaways down into the following short summaries.

Key Takeaways: Defining Housing Justice

What housing justice means to youth in Durham?

Summary statement: Students defined housing justice as the right for everyone to have access to a safe and affordable home. People should feel secure and not have to live in fear of losing their home.

Key supporting quote: *“When I think of housing justice, I mainly think of evictions because that’s what it leads to, [...] I’ve dealt with it personally too, where people don’t have enough money to take care of housing and then also be able to take care of their children and do things like that”*

SAFETY

- It means one can feel safe in knowing that they will be in a comfortable environment where they can live their daily lives.
- Having the right to a home, to live in a safe environment.
- Everyone is able to live in a safe household without having to break their whole paycheck.
- Everyone should have access to safe & comfortable household.
- Safe & secure
- To live in a home and not have the fear of losing it, the government or [landlords] having more power over their home.
- To have quality housing

AFFORDABILITY (PREVENTION, SUPPORT, RESOURCES)

- It’s about the prevention of losing your home.
- Having the support needed to get a safe place.
- No one should have to spend so much money on housing to the point where they lose their home.
- *“People don’t have enough money to take care of housing & then also be able to take care of their children, ...and do things...it leads to evictions”.*

ADVOCACY & RIGHTS

- Housing is a right that needs to be fought for
- Need more awareness for housing justice
- Battle between homelessness & right to have a home
- Everyone deserves to live on land and should not be homeless
- “[...] *that’s sad that we need housing to live, but it’s not a right*”

Key Takeaways: Impact on Youth

The impact housing instability has on youth?

Summary statement: Housing instability disrupts youth’s physical, emotional, and social environments. It also disrupts learning opportunities and access, hindering their current and future mobility.

Key supporting quote: “[*housing instability*] *It’s not helping make a difference or helping the youth get what they need in life or get what they need to be successful in life.*”

ENVIRONMENT

- Youth are put in a potentially unhealthy environment
- “I think that it affects them because it puts them in a different environment or it repeats the cycle, really.
- *Housing instability can cause youth to be put in an unhealthy environment. It can affect their education and potentially make the cycle of eviction routine [continue or routine?]*

EDUCATION

- Inconsistent school attendance
- Difficult in getting a better education due to stress and anxiety of eviction
- Hinders performance in school
- *“It does affect their education because you miss days of school when your parents trying to worry about not trying to evicted or they’re busy trying to make sure home is straight and okay, so that really affects the attendance and other things, so it affects education.”*

Key Takeaways: Compassionate Approaches

How can we be more understanding of tenants’ needs?

Summary statement: Spread awareness to raise understanding of the impact of housing instability on individuals, families, and communities. Those who have been most affected need to have a voice and be part of the solutions.

Key supporting quote: *“It’s sad how the people that evict people don’t really think about what goes in effect or what makes them not be able to pay bills or... They don’t think about that stuff. [...] people have to pay for those court fees and lawyer fees [...]. If they can’t pay rent, then how will they be able to pay for the other things? So we have to make the difference. [...] and that’s definitely something I want to do in the future when I have the funds or whatever that I need and I can help make a difference as well.”*

- More democratic approach to and awareness of tenants’ circumstances
- Extension for paying rent court costs
- Give voice to the voiceless
- Provide legal representation for every person facing eviction
- *“[...] it can almost be like a revolution of sorts in order to receive a sort of extension for paying rent and handling any court affairs.”*

Key Takeaways: Policy Changes

If you had a magic wand, what policies or systems would you address?

Summary statement: There needs to be a more holistic approach that starts with addressing the racial and systemic issues that continue the cycle of housing instability.

Key supporting quote: *“[...] you have to go to the root of the problem to solve what the after effects are [...]”*

- **Rent reduction/control**
- Tax reform
- Reduce poverty and other root or systemic issues
- Solutions, Right to Housing as starting point
- More mental health resources as a solution
- *“[...] start it with helping the less fortunate communities, less fortunate people because you have to go to the root of the problem to solve what the after effects are [...]”*
- *“If I had a magic wand I would reduce the lower class rent, which would help reduce evictions”-*

****Key Takeaways: Community Impact, Community Building****

Summary statement: Youth education and youth voices can play a key role in addressing housing instability within our communities. Informed youth can help build our communities today and well into the future.

Key supporting quote: *“[...] honestly when I get older I want to help people who are struggling in these areas.”*

"I guess there's a lot that goes on up under my nose and things that I don't necessarily have to worry about because I'm the age that I am, but it's still surprising to see that people are going through this so close to where I am."

- *In the listening session we heard a lot of people saying that they thought it was a good session. That they learned a lot in the session is and that they want to do more for the community*
 - " honestly when I get older I want to help people who are struggling in these areas"
 - "I think this was personally a great session because this allows us to truly understand the scope of the situation and it really informed me more about evictions"-

Demographic Data

33 Participants completed the demographic survey for the listening session.

