

Implementing the FHIP Grant

By M. DeAnna Eason

Housing Opportunities Made Equal is very enthusiastic about the new and exciting activities that our highly competitive Fair Housing Initiatives Program performance based grant that the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded us for \$791,530 will allow us to undertake during the next three years. This grant is the biggest ever received by a fair housing agency in Western New York. These activities outlined by the grant are full of possibility!

In addition to continuing the fair housing victim assistance work that HOME is known for, HOME will also have the opportunity to conduct fair-housing/fair lending education sessions for first time homebuyers in cooperation with HomeFront, Inc. These sessions explain the home buying process and potential discriminatory acts that may occur during the home buying process.

The grant also allows HOME to extend its outreach to faith-based and minority-based organizations, such as Hispanics United of Buffalo, the International Institute of Buffalo, Gerard Place, and Back-to-Basics Ministries. We look forward to working with these organizations to extend services to as many people as possible.

HOME will also work in partnership with the NYS Division of Human Rights and the Erie County Fair

Housing Partnership to conduct a fair housing seminar on the impediments to fair housing and the recommendations to alleviate the impediments to fair housing for housing professionals and all those interested in fair housing. The seminar will be held in October of 2009.

We are also in the process of developing advertising for buses and bus shelters regarding the subtleties of discrimination and the importance of reporting housing discrimination; so be on the lookout for HOME's name appearing in your community starting this summer.

The grant will also aid HOME in our ongoing plans to redevelop a building on the corner of Main and Ferry Streets for HOME's new home and to provide barrier-free energy efficient affordable housing.

HOME looks forward to the implementation of all aspects of the Fair Housing Initiatives Program performance based grant in order to provide the people of Western New York an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice. With each step taken under this new grant, we come closer to attaining our goals.

If you would like to know more about HOME happenings or how you can help, please call us at 854-1400 or visit us on the web at www.homeny.org. ■

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MEMBERSHIP IS OUR STRENGTH!

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Housing Opportunities Made Equal

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www.homeny.org



THANK YOU TO ALL OUR PATRONS . . .
The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, the John R. Oishei Foundation, the Town of Hamburg, the City of Buffalo, the Erie County CDBG Consortium, the Town of Amherst, HSBC Bank USA, M & T Bank, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, and donor designated contributions made through the State Employees' Federated Appeal, the Combined Federal Campaign and the United Way.
HOME's Wish List: Postage stamps, digital cameras with 1 GB memory cards, 1 GB thumb drives, volunteers for board committees.

HOME's Mission:
Housing Opportunities Made Equal is a civil rights organization working to assure the people of Western New York an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice through education, advocacy, enforcement of fair housing laws, and the creation of new housing opportunities.

INSIGHT

Western New York's Source for Fair Housing News

VOLUME 46 NO. 1

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MADE EQUAL 700 Main Street Buffalo NY 14202

Spring 2009

Judge Finds Bias By Broker

By Grace McKenzie

It was a cold December day in 2006 when Linda was searching for housing on the West Side of Buffalo near the Elmwood Avenue shopping district. Finding an apartment for rent in the listings section of the newspaper, she called the number listed in the advertisement and introduced herself over the telephone to the landlord, who scheduled a date and time for Linda to view the vacant apartment. However, when Linda kept her appointment to view the Norwood Avenue apartment, the landlord claimed it was already rented.

Knowing she didn't sound African-American on the telephone, Linda was uneasy about what occurred with the landlord, feeling like she was not treated fairly, and called Housing Opportunities Made Equal. Could this be racial discrimination?

HOME investigated the allegation of discrimination by sending out testers, trained observers who play the role of home seekers to obtain information about the potential availability of housing. According to legal papers, the African-American tester was told

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Getting on the GO!

By Kenneth J. Gholston

Recent studies of housing mobility programs have concluded that many home seekers who chose housing in low-poverty areas eventually relocated back to high-poverty areas because they did not receive assistance in solving any of the other issues that they face in their lives, such as lack of employment

or education. With this in mind, HOME, thanks to a generous grant from the John R. Oishei Foundation, created a new program to work in conjunction with the Community Housing Center's Mobility Program (CHC). The goal of the Greater Opportunities (GO!) Program is to assist individuals and families in making improvements in their lives with the ultimate goal of creating stability and self-sufficiency. HOME has partnered with the Creating Assets, Savings and Hope (CASH) Coalition to assist clients with credit

repair, The Goodwill to assist with job training and placement, and with the University at Buffalo's Educational

Opportunity Center (EOC) for clients who would like to further their education. HOME is also encouraging our clients to enroll in their respective Section 8 Agency's Self-Sufficiency Program,

with the goal of one day owning their own home.

Despite the relative newness of the program, its positive impacts are already being felt.

Karen and her two sons were homeless when she received her Section 8 voucher. With help from the CHC, she was able to find housing in Cheektowaga. During her meeting with GO! Program Social Worker Nicole Thorn, Karen stated that she had lost her job and her unemployment benefits were set

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Despite the relative newness of the GO! Program, its positive impacts are already being felt.

"The Power of People": HOME's 46th Annual Meeting and Dinner

By Shannon M. Koehn

They changed the world block by block, city by city, state by state, and even nation by nation. They are known to be catalysts of change: Susan B. Anthony helped to guarantee women's right to vote in the United States; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. challenged racial segregation and discrimination and through his dream inspired an entire nation to realize our collective dream of equality; Caesar Chavez helped farm workers to secure fair wages and labor rights; Jane

Jacobs helped to rebuild and revitalize city neighborhoods and made people consider the benefits of supporting urban cultures; our President of the United States of America Barack H. Obama, has made us recognize we can and will inspire change and that in deed we are the ones we've been waiting for. But those are just some of the better known champions. It is also you, the single mother making ends meet as you provide a holistic life for your children;

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From the Director: FAILING GRADES FOR FAIR HOUSING

By Scott W. Gehl

On December 9th the National Press Club served as backdrop for the unveiling of a 99-page report by the National Commission on Fair Housing, a bi-partisan group chaired by former HUD Secretaries Jack Kemp and Henry Cisneros.

After conducting high-profile public hearings in five cities and soliciting testimony from experts across the nation, the Commission assessed progress made during the four decades since passage of the Fair Housing Act. Although noting progress in some areas (such as laws extending rights to new protected classes, the adoption of ethical codes by industry groups prohibiting discrimination, and a reduction in discrimination in home sales), the Commission found that the nation remains divided. The principal culprit has remained government.

The Commission reports that out of an estimated 4 million incidents of housing discrimination yearly, only about 30,000 are reported. Handling fewer than 10 % of these incidents, HUD came under scathing criticism. Investigations, which the statute stipulates should be completed within 100 days, averaged 502 days. HUD's own inspector general found that 30 % of callers to a national hotline could not even get through on the first call; 90 % of cases closed for "no reasonable cause" lacked even an investigative plan.

However these alarming findings are not result of lack of effort, but lack of resources. Two former assistant secretaries testified that HUD's Office of Fair Housing needs 750 staff, but in 2007 staffing stood at only 579, the lowest level in 18 years. Although HUD receives an average of more than 2400 complaints yearly, the number of prosecutions fell from 88 (in 2001) to only 31 (in 2007) – in the entire nation.

The Department of Justice has averaged 6.9 cases over each of the past eight years;

few have dealt with fair lending, and none have challenged anti-immigrant legislation enacted by some municipalities. In 2001 DOJ adopted a policy of not litigating cases based on disparate impact analysis, retreating from doctrine established by the Supreme Court 30 years before.

The Commission was also highly critical of the federal government's failure to fulfill the mandate of the Fair Housing Act: that all federal agencies and grantees must "administer programs and activities related to housing and community development in a manner which affirmatively furthers [fair housing]". Although the definition of "affirmatively furthering" has changed over four decades, since the mid-90's grantees have been required to conduct an analysis of impediments to fair housing, to formulate an action plan to overcome impediments, and to keep records of progress. However, the Commission noted that HUD regulations neither specify what must be included in these studies nor require that they be submitted, reviewed and approved. As a result, many grantees have not taken seriously their fair housing obligations.

The Commission recommended a series of sweeping changes:

- * Creation of an independent fair housing enforcement agency staffed by career employees with competence in fair housing law;
- * Revival of the President's Fair Housing Council, which has met only once since it was established in 1994;
- * Reorienting the nation's largest housing programs (public housing, Section 8 and Low Income Housing Tax Credit) to help participants move to less segregated communities;
- * Establishing a structure to assure that federal grantees affirmatively further fair housing;
- * Expanding funding for the Fair Housing

Initiatives Program (the sole funding stream for private fair housing organizations, which handled 65% of discrimination cases) and undertaking a national education campaign;

- * Improving oversight of state and municipal agencies funded under the Fair Housing Assistance Program to insure they provide protections "substantially equivalent" to federal law; and
- * Amending federal law to clearly prohibit discrimination by internet publishers, to provide enforcement of "affirmatively furthering" obligations, and add a new protected class: source of income.

Benefits of diversity

When Congress passed the Fair Housing Act, diverse neighborhoods were regarded as primarily benefiting racial and ethnic minorities. Today there is a growing understanding of the benefits of diversity for the entire society.

The Commission's Report notes that inclusive, diverse communities:

- * Have better schools that enhance outcomes for all children;
- * Have robust housing markets not easily targeted by predatory lenders;
- * Contribute to regional economy by providing a range of housing choices for workers of various income categories and prevent concentrations of poverty;
- * Incorporate accessibility and housing options that maximize inclusion for people with disabilities; and
- * Successfully reduce negative social and economic consequences of sprawl by consolidating growth.

The logic of the report is compelling, and the need for diverse communities pressing in a nation where two-thirds of new households are formed by new immigrants or racial and ethnic minorities.

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 Contributions to HOME are Tax-Deductible.
 For more information contact Shannon Koehn at 854-1400.

HOME Caseload for 2008: Year in Review

By Grace McKenzie

Last year was a banner year for Housing Opportunities Made Equal. Not only did we receive a highly competitive grant from HUD, but we came closer to accomplishing our goal of reaching as many people as possible.

Last year the total number of requests for service received from the Western New York community increased to 5,080, up twelve percent over the 2007 total of 4,452.

Last year, HOME processed 213 discrimination complaints, a slight increase over the number of discrimination incidents reported in 2007. Of the 213 discrimination incidents registered last year, thirty-five percent involved source of income discrimination, thirty percent involved race and/or color discrimination, twenty percent involved familial status discrimination, and fifteen percent involved disability discrimination. This is the first year ever that source of income discrimination has been the most frequently reported type of housing bias in Western New York. This is truly a milestone that shows the areas in which Western New York really needs to focus on alleviating.

In 2008, sixty-six percent of reported discrimination incidents occurred in the City of Buffalo

while twenty-four percent of incidents occurred within Erie County, and ten percent of the discrimination incidents occurred in neighboring counties.

Not only are the numbers increased for the total amount of calls received by HOME, but the amount of landlord/tenant calls in 2008 was six percent above the 2007 number of landlord/tenant calls.

HOME's Greater Buffalo Community Housing Center has also experienced an increase in the number of clients served in 2008. Last year the Community Housing Center helped twenty-five percent more Section 8 clients than in 2007. This is largely due to the receipt of the grants from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the John R. Oishei Foundation that enabled the program to expand and excel.

The staff at HOME has worked diligently during 2008 to achieve such results. We can only hope to match or exceed these statistics for growth in 2009. ■



Leave A legacy ... HOUSING Opportunities Made Equal exists because of the continuing support of our members who desire to live in a community free of discrimination. For all those who share this belief, there is another way to support HOME's mission—by *Leaving A Legacy to HOME*. For information on a making a planned gift to HOME's John Howland Koekoek Endowment for Fair Housing Education, contact Shannon Koehn at 854-1400. ext17 or skoehn@homeny.org.

Spotlight Story of the Month: Nicole Thorn, Social Worker of HOME

"Be the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi said this and it's a quote I live by. To me it means that change happens one person at a time and that people need to lead by example.

Part of being a social worker is challenging social injustices and changing the way society treats less-advantaged people, one person at a time. People are the product of their environment and can often times get stuck in cycles of poverty or violence because environmental barriers prevent them from being successful. Change is often times a scary thing and if poverty is all you've ever known, you may be terrified of getting a job or worried about rejection. Or perhaps you don't have a high school diploma or GED and just assume that no one will hire you anyways.

You can move from a high poverty area to a quiet city neighborhood or suburb but until you address the

barriers that prevented you from being successful in the first place, the problem will remain.

HOME's GO!
Program is here to help others gain skills to become self-sufficient.

HOME's Greater Opportunities (GO!) Program recognizes these barriers that people often come across and is here to help others gain the skills to become self-sufficient. The GO! Program offers support through advocacy, locating valuable resources, and assisting clients with overcoming barriers to their personal success.

Being a social worker means assisting individuals with realizing their own potential. It means helping people reach their highest level possible of social functioning. Too often people come to me wary, frustrated, exhausted, and about to give up hope. It is my job to keep that hope alive and help people realize their full potential.

The GO! Program is helping to break the cycle of poverty in Western New York, one client at a time and I am proud to be part of it! ■

“The Power of People”: HOME’s 46th Annual Meeting and Dinner

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you the educator who chooses to invest the necessary time in a child because you see his potential if only given the opportunity, and you the lawyer who diligently advocates for your clients who are often the marginalized amongst society. No matter your position, profession or political party we are all people with significant power and ability to be, as Mohandas Ghandi said, “the change we want to see.”

Housing Opportunities Made Equal recognizes the numerous contributions of all our champions, near and afar. We honor the support of you – our friends, colleagues and generous members. It is through such support that the essential work of eradicating discrimination in the segregated housing landscape of Western New York has begun. HOME stands with the support of so many, at the forefront of this continued vigilance for equality. So, on Thursday, April 30th stand with us as we celebrate HOME’s 46th Anniversary, “The Power of People.” We invite you to join us as we gather together at the Buffalo-Niagara Convention Center (complimentary parking upon reservation). We will celebrate Fair Housing Month and many of the individuals who have contributed to the cause and stood up to make a difference.

We will begin the evening at 5:00 p.m. as we meet new friends and reunite with others over cocktails and hor’dourves. Here you can participate in a 50/50 drawing and basket raffles including prizes such as a family membership to the Buffalo Museum of Science, Fire Safety Kits, Wines of the World and plenty of other wonderful items!

At 6:00 p.m.. the evening will move on to dinner and the program with a Master of Ceremonies by

Channel 4’s own Jacqui Walker. You will enjoy learning more about HOME and fair housing with a special slideshow presentation. Receive an updated report on our exciting new Home for HOME capital project. Awards and scholarships will be presented to a local high school student and community activists. And, back by popular demand, is our live auction featuring the famous Cash Cunningham assisted by HOME’s own Mark D. Evans. Some live auction items include signed Buffalo Bills paraphernalia, Gourmet Cooking Classes and a wonderful Florida get-away!

There are so many ways to get involved in this event: there is still time to purchase an advertisement in our souvenir journal. The deadline for journal ad submissions is April 17, 2009. You may become a sponsor of the event where your company’s logo would be prominently displayed. There is still time to buy a ticket for \$55.00 each or a table of up to ten seats for the dinner. You may also consider donating an item for either the basket raffle or the live auction. Visit us on Facebook, on our website at www.homeny.org or feel free to contact Shannon M. Koehn at 716.854.1400 extension 17 for more information about the dinner and to reserve your spot today! ■

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

~Margaret Mead

Facts about Source of Income Discrimination in Buffalo

In 2006, the City of Buffalo passed a Fair Housing Ordinance making lawful source of income a protected class. Lawful source of income is earnings coming from any legal source, such as alimony, working wages, or from a government program, such as social security or Section 8.

Since this law has been enacted, Housing Opportunities Made Equal has seen an increase in the number of complaints made because of lawful source of income discrimination.

In 2008, thirty-five percent of discrimination incidents reported to HOME involved lawful source of income discrimination. This is almost a ten percent increase over the proportion of incidents from 2007.

Fair Housing proponents have pointed out that the Ordinance has exemptions for owner occupied parcels of three or fewer units.

If you have Section 8 or any other government subsidy and would like to know your rights under the Buffalo Fair Housing Ordinance, please contact HOME today. ■

Membership News

Housing Opportunities Made Equal has expanded its membership to include children and teenagers interested in civil rights. In the Membership Renewal Box on Page 2 of Insight, you will notice the two new levels of membership. Please encourage the young people in your life to become members of HOME. There are benefits to membership for people of all ages, along with the good feelings that come with donating to a worthy cause. For more information about membership to HOME, please contact Shannon M. Koehn at 716-854-1400 extension 17. Thank you for your support! ■

GETTING ON THE GO ...

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to expire soon. While Section 8 covered the full amount of her rent and utilities, Karen didn't want to be put in the same situation she just came out of. But while Karen was focused on the short term, she also had the long term goal of owning her own home. She loved the neighborhood that she had moved into, and would one day like to have a home of her own where her sons could play safely, and where they would get a good education. Thanks to the services of the GO! Program, Karen is now in a job training and placement program at The Goodwill, and is even taking classes at EOC towards getting her GED.

Roger is another client who has recently entered into the GO! Program. He immigrated to the U.S. almost 30 years ago from Liberia. After using his Section 8 voucher to rent an apartment in North Buffalo, Roger wanted to focus on two long term goals-to buy a home for himself and his teenaged-sons, and to eventually start his own business. Roger wants to use his experience as an immigrant to help other immigrants and refugees with transitioning into American culture and life. Roger is now working with a counselor at the CASH Coalition to help him save money to achieve both of his lifelong dreams.

Miranda has been working as a bus-aide for the past couple years. She loves the company she works for, and hopes that one day she can move into a fulltime administrative position there. She knows that she can't do that, however without going back to school and getting her GED. Miranda thinks it's important to further her education not only for her own career, but to set a good example for her 7 year-old daughter, whom she raises alone. With help from the CHC, Miranda

was able to find a two-bedroom apartment in Kenmore, and is now working with EOC to get her GED.

Karen, Roger, and Miranda are just three examples of people trying better themselves and their families. They, along with all the clients of the GO! Program are trying to create a stable and happy life for their families, and to fulfill their dreams. The GO! Program can't wait to help them get there. ■

From the Director

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Important addition to the staff

In the last issue of Insight, I wrote of HOME's hire of a part-time attorney to aid discrimination victims by preparing administrative complaints and attending investigatory conferences and hearings. Although working with us only a few hours each week, Jennifer Metzger has done some solid work and made a very favorable impression.

With the new FHIP contract, in January HOME posted a full-time staff attorney position and subsequently interviewed four talented attorneys. After considering relative strengths of an impressive candidate pool, the interview team chose Jennifer for this critical position. ■

INSIGHT

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 Nicole Thorn, *Social Worker*

Contributors

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 Kenneth J. Gholston, Shannon M. Koehn,
 Nicole Thorn and Grace McKenzie, *Editor*

JUDGE FINDS BIAS BY BROKER ...

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over the telephone by the landlord that the apartment was still under construction and never given the opportunity to view the apartment. By contrast, the white tester was able to view the apartment and was offered the apartment by the landlord if her references checked out and she paid the appropriate fees. Armed with this information, HOME filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development referred the matter to the New York State Division of Human Rights for investigation and adjudication. After hearing sworn testimony, Administrative Law Judge Thomas S. Protano found that the landlord had discriminated and ordered the landlord, licensed real estate broker Gloria D. Mosovich, to pay the complainant \$3,240 in compensatory damages and to pay New York State a \$5,000 civil penalty. Ms. Mosovich was also ordered to cease and desist from future discriminatory acts.

If you are not sure if you have been discriminated against, but just have a feeling that you were not treated fairly, please call HOME to report it. ■



Site of the Norwood Avenue discrimination.