“Each One, Reach One”
October Membership Event

On October 9th, 2008 from 6 pm until 8 pm, HOME celebrated the members of HOME, with an event entitled “Each One, Reach One.” This event was designed for each member of HOME to bring a friend, family member or colleague to the event to learn about HOME and the benefits of becoming a member of HOME.

It was a crisp Autumn evening at Canisius College’s Grupp Fireside Lounge where baskets were raffled along with a weekend getaway to Letchworth State Park’s Glen Iris Inn. Janet Barnes won the weekend at the Glen Iris Inn! Congratulations to all of the winners that evening!

Special thanks go to Rita Capezzi and John Hurley who were instrumental in Canisius College’s generous donation of the venue, and the members of HOME that donated the refreshments and prizes that were raffled. Without you, the heartbeat of HOME, there would be no events. If you did not get the opportunity to come to this event, consider attending the next one!

Collin Gehl was the emcee. Ken Gholston and Kristen Luppino won a prize!

Jennifer Metzger and Kenji Kimura enjoyed their first HOME event.

Diana Cooke and her father enjoyed the event.

Jean McKeown, Scott Gehl and Janet Barnes listened to the presentation.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR PATRONS . . .
Source of Income Discrimination Victims to Get Their Day in Court

Sam thought that his initial receipt of a Section 8 voucher was a new lease on life. He could live in the housing and in the community of his choice, the speaker said during his orientation. Only he had to make an educated decision on where he would like to live next. North Buffalo was his community of choice. He went to an apartment complex in the Parkside area eager to view an available unit, only to be told: “We do not accept Section 8 here, but we do accept it at our Riverside location.” Feeling dejected, Sam was denied housing based on his source of income. Was this illegal? What could he do about it?

Unfortunately, Sam’s story is not unusual. Landlords advertise on the internet everyday listing preferences, such as “no Section 8.” Twenty-three percent of Housing Opportunities Made Equal’s discrimination cases last year involved source of income discrimination cases that occurred in the City of Buffalo. Source of income discrimination is illegal in the City of Buffalo, the Town of Hamburg and the Town of West Seneca. Even though there are local ordinances to protect against source of income discrimination, this kind of discrimination is pervasive on internet websites. Housing Opportunities Made Equal has an Investigations Coordinator who monitors the newspapers as well as

HUD’s Unprecedented Award Supports HOME, Fair Housing Enforcement

A recent call from the office of senior United States Senator Charles M. Schumer brought great news. Housing Opportunities Made Equal’s application under the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s highly competitive Fair Housing Initiatives Performance Based Program had been approved. HUD has committed an unprecedented $791,539 in a three-year grant for fair housing education and enforcement in Western New York to HOME.

Unfortunately but true, the Buffalo-Niagara region is deemed the seventh most segregated metropolitan area in the nation. It’s no wonder, then, that there is a great need for fair housing services. HOME remains the only agency in this region to provide comprehensive fair housing services necessary to aid in the eradication of such segregation.

Research indicates that housing discrimination is consistently the one reason for continuing racial and economic segregation in the United

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From the Director: A NEW DAY

By Scott W. Gehl

America stayed up late the night of November 4th—wondering what course had been chosen by a majority of voters and even whether the decision of the majority would determine who the next president would be. For civil rights advocates—perhaps more often known for determination than optimism—the election of an African-American president signaled a new day.

At Howard University, one year ago this past September, then Senator Barack Obama said (in part):

I am not just running to make history. I’m running because I believe that together, we can change history’s course. I believe it’s time for this generation to write our own chapter in the American story. After all, those who came before us did not strike a blow against injustice so that we would allow injustice to fester in our time.

Thurgood Marshall did not argue Brown so that we would accept a country where too many African-American men end up in prison because we’d rather spend more to jail a 25-year-old than to educate a five-year-old.

Dr. King did not take us to the mountaintop so that we would allow a terrible storm to ravage those who were stranded in the valley; he would not have expected that it would take a hurricane to reveal the hungry God asks us to feed and the sick He asks us to care for.

The students who left their homes to march in the streets of Birmingham and Montgomery, and the mothers who walked instead of taking the bus after a long day of doing somebody else’s laundry and cleaning—they didn’t brave fire hoses and Billy clubs so that their grandchildren and great-grandchildren would still wonder at the beginning of the next century whether their vote would be counted; whether their civil rights would be protected; whether justice would be equal and opportunity would be theirs.

They did it because they understood that sometimes there are moments when what’s truly risky is not to act. What’s truly risky is to let the same injustice remain year after year. What’s truly risky is to accept things as they are instead of working for what could be.

Of course, we know full well that race does not determine the content of one’s character; for that we must go beyond even words—to actions. But make no mistake about the importance of words and symbols, which can potentially lower barriers that have long separated us.

In the days before Thanksgiving, in a proceeding related to a federal race discrimination case, I was reminded just how far we have still to go.

New staff at HOME

Thanks to a grant from the John R. Oishei Foundation, we have added Social Worker Nicole Thorn and Mobility Counselor Melissa Sommerville to our staff. Working under the guidance of Ken Gholston, this new staff will permit HOME to nearly double the number of clients assisted by the Community Housing Center, to increase the services we provide, and to offer those who chose to move to opportunity communities access to case management and innovative collaborations with UB’s Educational Opportunity Center, the Goodwill, and the CASH Coalition.

HOME has also made important progress on the legal front, where for 11 months review of cases, drafting of administrative complaints, and appearances at investigatory conferences and administrative hearings have been handled by this writer in addition to his preexisting duties. The fact that HOME filed only eight administrative complaints during this period underlined the fact that this staffing model did not work.

Despite a deficit budget, the Board voted to authorize the hire of an attorney to work a few hours each week. Jennifer J. Metzger, a graduate of Cleveland-Marshall School of Law, has filled this important role.

We look forward to positive impact Nicole, Melissa and Jennifer will have on the lives of our clients.
SAVE THE DATE
Thursday, April 30, 2009
HOME’s 46th Anniversary Celebration!

Mark your calendars NOW!
Plan to join us at the Buffalo-Niagara Convention Center for an enjoyable evening of cocktails, basket raffles, dinner, dancing, live auction, scholarships and awards. Special ticket prices for HOME members. Be sure to become a HOME member today!

Stay tuned for more information
Thanks for a great 2008! You supported HOME in a BIG way and we greatly appreciate you!

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 Koekkoek Endowment for Fair Housing Education, contact Shannon Koehn at 854-1400. ext17 or skoehn@homeny.org.

Spotlight Story of the Month: Nichelle Brown, Senior Counselor of HOME

When I first came aboard at HOME as a Senior Counselor, I never really anticipated the magnitude of the impact this organization has on people. I knew HOME was known for assisting tenants to understand fair housing laws, but the fact that HOME is so instrumental in seeking justice for discrimination victims was rather new to me.

The phone calls I receive daily have given me a great appreciation for the little things many people may take for granted. When I counsel a tenant who may be living paycheck to paycheck in uninhabitable conditions and dealing with a landlord who does not live in the city and refuses to return calls or address maintenance issues, this just doesn’t sit well with me.

Working at HOME is more than just a job to me. It’s a responsibility I have to people who may believe that they don’t have a say in where and how they live. I try to give them the most accurate information possible. I also encourage landlord accountability. Providing fair housing information to landlords and explaining the proper way to choose good tenants is just as important.

My education and background in Human Services have prepared me to try to represent people in the most advantageous way possible. I am grateful that my education and my life experiences have given me a great deal of compassion and understanding that I try on a daily basis to project to the underrepresented.

At the end of the day, I have a great sense of gratitude and appreciation for the work I do. I enjoy helping people and leave with a good conscience because I know I have shown people that there is someone out there who cares.
States. Segregated neighborhoods cause poverty to be concentrated in areas often times with fewer resources. Families restricted to living in areas of concentrated poverty are forced to send their children to racially segregated schools, severely limiting the necessary exchange of perspectives. This perpetuates a negative cycle that HOME, by its very mission, works to break.

One way in which HOME seeks to educate and enforce fair housing laws is to monitor housing advertisements and to investigate potentially discriminatory practices. The FHIP grant will support an expanded number of investigations of reported incidents of discrimination and permit resumption of systemic testing of larger housing providers. A related component will involve examination of multi-family housing complexes to ascertain compliance with accessibility standards of the Fair Housing Amendments Act.

FHIP funds will also support outreach to municipal code enforcement officials regarding federal accessibility standards as well as educational presentations to homeless populations and first-time homebuyers. In-services trainings will also be offered to landlords, housing providers, faith-based and minority-serving organizations.

HUD funding will support new HOME publications (in Spanish and English) intended to inform people of their housing rights. Information on the hazards of lead paints and other toxic agents will also be provided to HOME clients under the FHIP grant. Additional Energy Star initiatives will be incorporated as HOME moves to build the new home for HOME at the corner of Main and West Ferry Streets.

Over the three-year term of the grant HOME will provide service to over 4,000 people per year. The FHIP grant will also enable us to expand the enforcement of fair housing laws from the Buffalo-Niagara region into the five adjoining counties of Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Chautauqua and Cattaraugus. Additionally, you will be able to see more of HOME as advertisements appear on buses or bus shelters near you.

FHIP funding is a major source of support to HOME’s programs. We have been the recipient of numerous HUD awards. Even still, FHIP is not a given. The process for submitting an application is not only labor intensive but nail biting right down to waiting for your electronic application to transmit. It is only through much collaboration that such a process is attainable.

According to September 2008 Testimony by National Fair Housing Alliance Senior Vice President Cathy Cloud: “Over the past five years, at least fourteen fair housing organizations nationwide have closed their doors due to lack of funding. At least twelve other organizations have had to significantly curtail or eliminate their enforcement activities due to cutbacks, including reduction of staff. All told, 26 fair housing centers, or one quarter of all fair housing centers throughout the country, have closed or are at risk.”

HOME has had to experience devastating times in which we were not recipients of such funding. In those times we survived because we remained true to our mission but did so with diminished capacity. Thankfully, because of a dedicated staff and board, HOME’s doors remain open.

As long as segregation and discrimination remain in our community, it is HOME’s goal to continue to fight. We are thrilled to have this multi-year support; it means we continue to move toward a time in which we will embrace true diversity.
SOURCE OF INCOME . . .
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the internet for discriminatory advertising. “No Section 8” is a common form of discriminatory advertising and source of income discrimination.

HOME is working with the Western New York Law Center as well as Neighborhood Legal Services to file discrimination cases, like Sam’s case, in court, after administrative filings yielded no results. HOME is collaborating with these legal agencies to get the victims of source of income discrimination the justice in court that they deserve. There are now seven cases under review for court action. With the help of Western New York Law Center and Neighborhood Legal Services, HOME is making a difference in combating source of income discrimination as it enforces the fair housing law.

Maybe there will be a time in the future where we may say that source of income is a protected class state-wide or nation-wide. For now we look toward our municipalities to pave the way.

In the meanwhile, landlords who use Craigslist or other internet websites for advertising must be aware that source of income is a protected class in some communities and one must not use discriminatory language when writing an advertisement. The best guideline is to write an advertisement describing the unit that is available for rent or purchase and do not describe the person or people to whom one would like to rent or sell. If this general guideline is followed, then most likely the landlord will not write a discriminatory advertisement.

Everyone should know his or her rights under the laws and know that source of income discrimination is real and prevalent in Western New York. Furthermore, everyone should also know that HOME is here to help the victims of source of income discrimination to get the justice that they deserve.

As HOME continues to process source of income discrimination cases with the assistance of Western New York Law Center and Neighborhood Legal Services, it is good to know there is a collaborative venue for these cases to get their day in court.

This is the apartment complex in Parkside where Sam was allegedly denied housing because of his source of income.

INSIGHT

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Contributors
Nichelle Brown, Scott W. Gehl, Shannon M. Koehn, and Grace McKenzie, Editor

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION CASE . . .
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and he consulted with his staff. Emerging from an inner office, the landlord reported (according to John’s sworn complaint) that they had told him only half the story; the real issue was not payment of the security deposit, but John’s condition which would “freak out other residents” and cause extra work for apartment managers. Mr. LoRusso attempted to steer John to another complex he owned, where there was a back corner apartment and other tenants would not be disturbed. Reduced to tears, John refused and called Housing Opportunities Made Equal.

The New York State Division of Human Rights investigated and found probable cause to believe discrimination had occurred. Before the case would go to trial, Mr. LoRusso and Brent Manor Apartments agreed to settle the case. With no admission of wrongdoing, Mr. LoRusso and Brent Manor Apartments agreed*
to abide by the fair housing laws,
*tomarket Brent Manor Apartments as an equal opportunity housing provider,
*to attend fair housing training,
*to formulate a written procedure for tenant selection that complies with the fair housing laws,
*to provide HOME with a list of all rental property owned or managed by Mr. LoRusso, and
*topay $5,000 to the complainants.

Eighteen percent of discrimination cases handled by HOME last year involved people with disabilities. If you or someone you know has suffered from discrimination due to having a disability of any kind, please call HOME as soon as possible, since HOME is always here to help!