HOME receives about 1,500 calls each year from people with housing problems. Some feel they have experienced discrimination. Some are upset about the lack of repairs in their apartments. Some are having trouble finding affordable housing. How do these people know to call HOME?

In recent years, HOME has increased its media reach through radio ads, an updated interactive website, and even a billboard campaign. However, we still find one of the best ways to reach people regarding their housing rights and to encourage them to call HOME is through small group presentations given by Consumer Education Specialist Myra Calder.

Calder personally reached more than 1,000 people with HOME’s message in 2012. She is knowledgeable about housing discrimination, tenant rights, and lending issues and is able to customize a presentation to the interests of the audience whether it’s made up of those living in shelters, agency staff working with seniors, or employees facing a plant closing. She also hosts booths to talk one-on-one with people at community gatherings such as the Neighborhood Summit, Stand Down for the Homeless, and back-to-school events. In addition, she periodically sets up a table at the Healing Center at the Vineyard Church to share information with staff, clients and visitors.

“At a recent presentation for staff at the Department of Developmental Disabilities Services, we had a discussion about reasonable accommodations,” Calder said. “Actual situations shared by the audience helped everyone learn. Often when I speak at staff meetings, such professionals list examples and others say, ‘You can do that!’ or ‘You did what!’ Fair housing lessons are remembered best when participants ask questions and discuss scenarios.

“In presentations to general audiences, I find people often had faced illegal discrimination and didn’t know it. I’ll state it is illegal for a landlord to say ‘No kids’ only to have someone say, ‘But that just happened to me a month ago.’ This is a great opening to urge them to call HOME.

“Some of the saddest examples of illegal discrimination are those given by women at homeless shelters who were sexually harassed or intimidated by a previous landlord.”

If you are interested in a speaker for your staff meeting, parent-teacher organization, church, school or other community group, call Calder at 513-977-2623, send her an email at myra.calder@homecincy.org or click on the “Schedule a Speaker” button on the HOME website.
HOME Recommends … Clybourne Park

Playhouse in the Park is staging “Clybourne Park” from Jan. 18 through Feb. 16, 2014.

Called “ferociously smart” by The New York Times and “uproariously funny” by Entertainment Weekly, Clybourne Park is the most acclaimed play of the decade — winner of the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award for Best Play.

The play is a spin-off of Lorraine Hansberry’s classic “A Raisin in the Sun.” In two acts set 50 years apart, the same Chicago bungalow sits at a volatile intersection of race and real estate — initially in 1959 with its sale to the neighborhood’s first black family and again in 2009 during the first wave of role-reversing gentrification.

While the stakes have changed, the debate remains strikingly familiar in this razor-sharp satire.

Ask Nicole

Nicole Kelch is HOME’s tenant advocate. In addition to serving clients who call the office, she answers inquiries from the ‘Ask a Question’ form on HOME’s website. HOME does not give legal advice, but provides general information on Ohio landlord-tenant law and helps tenants understand their options.

Pam: My lease expires in three months, but my property owner has decided to sell the property. The property manager has given me no formal notice, but the buyer’s agent sent me a termination of lease saying “we came to a buyout agreement” and I have 30 days to vacate the property. I never negotiated a buyout with anyone. What are my rights under the lease?

Nicole: Typically if a practice has established a pattern of when rent is paid and late fees are not enforced, a tenant has the right to rely on that pattern continuing until notified otherwise. If the new manager wants to establish its own policies and practices, it may do so with proper notice, usually 30 days. To avoid having the argument escalate to eviction court, perhaps you could approach the new manager to talk about the previous policy, show copies of old receipts to confirm, and assure her that in the future you will abide by the new policy.

John: I usually pay my rent on the 7th of the month, due to my work’s payment system. This is considered late under my lease, but I have always had the fee waived. New management has taken over and will not accept rent late this month unless I pay the fee. Do I have to pay the late fee?

Nicole: Generally, under Ohio landlord-tenant law, when someone purchases rental property, they buy it subject to any existing leases and must honor them. However, it is possible for a stipulation in the tenant’s lease contract to spell out something different.

FAIR HOUSING MOCK MEDIATION

Monday, November 11, 2013
1:00 to 4:00 PM
United Way Building, Cincinnati

HOME and the Cincinnati Area Board of Realtors are conducting a mock mediation related to fair housing to educate Realtors and others about what to expect when faced with a complaint of discrimination. The mediation will model the type of conciliation offered by the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. Jackie Tolbert, a trained mediator formerly with the Commission, will serve as the mediator in the educational event.

Today it is more common for discrimination complaints to be filed using the administrative process rather than filed directly in court, according to Brandon Craig, HOME Compliance Manager.

“Mock trials are fun to watch, but it is much more likely that Realtors will find themselves in an administrative proceeding than in court, according to Brandon Craig, HOME Compliance Manager.

“Mock trials are fun to watch, but it is much more likely that Realtors will find themselves in an administrative proceeding than in court and it is important to understand the process,” he said. “Many complaints can be settled at an early mediation meeting without the time and cost of a full investigation and hearing."

The Board of Realtors has obtained CEUs for the 3-hour educational program. Register on their website: www.cabr.org.
A trio of community leaders received awards Sept. 27 at HOME’s 45th Anniversary Dinner. Josh Spring, left, executive director of the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition, received the Karla J. Irvine Fair Housing Advocate Award. Michele Stacy, above third from left, of Sibcy Cline Realtors took home the Founders’ Award for her commitment to HOME’s fair housing mission. She stands with, from left: Harold Jones, chair of the Anniversary Committee; Frank Bowen, board president; and Elizabeth Brown, executive director. Lydia Morgan, far right, was given the Theodore M. Berry Award for her work as founder and organizer of Juneteenth Cincinnati. Her longtime friend, attorney Johnie Davis, presented the award.

Enforcement Notes

When people call about possible housing discrimination, HOME helps them gather evidence and explain enforcement options. Sometimes issues are resolved with an explanation of the fair housing laws or through mediation. Sometimes further actions are required. So far in 2013, HOME has filed or helped clients file 13 discrimination complaints with HUD or the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. Some of those pending cases include:

- A single mother with two children applied for an apartment in a four-family building in Cheviot. She called HOME, and our testing confirmed that the owner will not rent to families with children.
- An African American professional being transferred to Cincinnati by Procter & Gamble called HOME when he believed his application to lease a single-family home in Clermont County was denied because of his race. When discussions with the owner’s Realtor and the real estate company failed to resolve the issue, both he and his real estate agent filed discrimination complaints with HUD. In the meantime, his family leased a home in Liberty Township for $2,100 a month.
- A family of seven called HOME when they were told they could not rent a four-bedroom house in Butler County because it was too small for her family. Testing confirmed that the owner would not rent to large families.
- HOME assisted a woman file a retaliation complaint against a Clermont County landlord when she received an eviction notice after testifying on behalf of a neighbor who had filed a sexual harassment complaint.

Foreclosure Prevention Program Ends

After seven years, HOME has ended its Foreclosure Prevention counseling services. A grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development that had helped to fund the program in recent years expired on Oct. 15.

Since 2007 when the foreclosure crisis began, HOME’s Bill Hanks saved about 1,000 homeowners who were at risk of foreclosure because of predatory loan terms or because of job loss, major illness, divorce or death of a spouse.
Harris in Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame

HOME board member Robert Lee Harris was among seven inducted into the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame in ceremonies Oct. 3. Fellow Cincinnatian Marjorie Parham, former publisher of The Cincinnati Herald newspaper, also was inducted this year.

Harris was nominated for the recognition by HOME for his “lifetime of actively helping to advance civil rights, equality and inclusion for people of color and people with disabilities in Ohio.”

Through his careers as an artist, instructor, consultant, lecturer and counselor as well as his volunteer efforts, he has spent more than 30 years advocating for diversity, cultural awareness and social change. He continues that mission now as president of the board of directors for the Cincinnati Human Rights Commission. He also has served on dozens of boards and committees throughout the region and the state.

Harris is part of the fifth class of inductees into the Hall of Fame. Previous winners include Marian Spencer, fellow HOME board member, and the late Karla Irvine, former HOME executive director. Both were inducted in 2010.