Serving Spanish-Speaking Clients

The Cincinnati metropolitan region has a Hispanic population of about 60,000 people, according to the 2010 Census. The actual number likely is much higher because the official count is believed to have missed many Spanish-speaking residents. While this is not a large percentage of our population compared to other regions in the country, it does represent a significant population needing safe, decent and fair housing. To help address those needs, HOME has two bilingual employees.

Teresita Lewis has been with the fair housing program since 2004. In addition to talking with Hispanic clients about possible housing discrimination, she serves as project manager for the HUD fair housing enforcement grant. She recently gathered evidence that resulted in HOME and a client filing a discrimination complaint against a mobile home park in Butler County that discouraged Hispanics from buying homes within the development.

Fernanda Torres-Browne works with Spanish-speaking tenants on landlord-tenant issues, particularly property conditions. She conducts outreach through Su Casa, the Hispanic ministry of Catholic Charities, and through presentations at churches that have Spanish services. She has worked with tenants at several large apartment complexes, facilitating communication with property managers and bringing in local government inspectors when necessary to address substandard conditions. She is part of HOME’s Tenant Advocacy program funded by United Way.

As part of our education and outreach efforts, HOME places ads (like the one to the right) in La Jornada Latina, a bi-weekly Spanish language newspaper, as well as ads on La Mega 97.7 FM, the region’s Spanish radio station. Our goal is to ensure that all Southwest Ohio residents know that housing discrimination is illegal and HOME can help victims fight for their rights.
Enforcement Notes

Recent action in housing discrimination cases filed by HOME and HOME clients includes:

The Ohio Civil Rights Commission confirmed the findings of the Administrative Law Judge and awarded $55,000 in damages to the tenants in Gunn v. Hein, the “White Only” pool sign case filed in 2011.

Colbert v. Towne Properties was a reasonable accommodations case in Federal Court filed by a HOME client. It involved a request for an assigned parking place for a person with a disability at a condominium in Cincinnati. The case was settled for $30,000.

Anderson v. City of Blue Ash involves an unusual assistance animal, a miniature horse kept by a family with a severely disabled child. Although the animal was recommended by the child’s doctor and is specifically trained as an assistance animal, the City insists the family cannot keep it because it is “livestock.” A housing discrimination complaint against the city has been filed with the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development for denial of a request for a reasonable accommodation.

Thank You, Annette

HOME recently joined in celebrating the contributions of Annette Chmiel, who retired at the end 2013 after 28 years with the Cincinnati Area Board of Realtors. Most recently, she served as the CABR’s Director of Education and worked closely with Deb Jetter, HOME’s Director of Education, in coordinating various training programs for real estate professionals. HOME Executive Director Elizabeth Brown presented a plaque to Annette during a reception in her honor. The text of that plaque reads:

Housing Opportunities Made Equal Honors Annette Chmiel for 28 years of service with CABR where she upheld high standards of fairness and built a productive relationship between Realtors and HOME. 2013

Donate Now at www.uwgc.org.
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: www.homecincy.org. HOME does not give legal advice, but does provide general information on Ohio landlord-tenant law and helps tenants understand their options.

Jackie: The parking area and sidewalks at my building are never plowed, shoveled or salted during winter. Isn’t this a landlord’s responsibility?

Nicole: Ohio courts have found that there is no general obligation for a landlord to treat “natural accumulations” of ice and snow. However, your city or local jurisdiction may have a requirement for removal because of health and safety concerns. Also, if conditions affect a person with a disability, it may be possible to request a reasonable accommodation to have snow and ice removed.

Ask Nicole

HOME Holiday Reception

HOME hosted its annual Holiday Reception on Dec. 13 to celebrate the agency’s partners, supporters and friends. As part of the festivities, HOME presented an award to Rick Morgan, center left, for 17 years of service on HOME’s board. With him are his wife, Nancy, and local attorney Robert Newman. HOME board members Lydia Morgan, far left, and Stephanie Moes shared a meal at the reception. Board member Marian Spencer, near right, enjoyed a visit with Lana Smith, coordinator for the Hamilton County Tenant-Based Assistance Program.

Paul: My smoke detector’s batteries died recently and I replaced them. Now I wonder, who is responsible for checking and maintaining those?

Nicole: Generally the landlord is required to supply smoke detectors and repair/replace them if they malfunction. However, the battery itself falls within the tenant responsibilities of maintaining and operating appliances and equipment properly. Tenants should never remove or dismantle any smoke detectors.
See the Play, then Join the Conversation

Race and real estate are the focus of the new play being staged from Jan. 18 through Feb. 16 at Cincinnati’s Playhouse in the Park. A spin-off of Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun, Clybourne Park is set in the same Chicago bungalow 50 years apart. The first act spotlights its sale to the community’s first black family in 1959. The second act transpires in 2009 when white suburbanites have bought the home because of their decision to return to life in the city. The play uses razor-sharp satire to raise challenging questions about how we relate to our neighbors when they don’t fit with the image we have of our community.

To discuss those ideas and how they manifest themselves in the Cincinnati region, HOME has partnered with the Playhouse and the University of Cincinnati Kunz Center for Social Research to host a free community-wide discussion from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 6, at the United Way building, corner of Reading Road and Morgan Street in Walnut Hills.

Moderator Dan Hurley, noted journalist and director of Leadership Cincinnati, will join panelists Kathryne Gardette, president of Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation; Jeffrey Timberlake, urban sociologist at the University of Cincinnati; and Clybourne Park Director Timothy Douglas to kick off the discussion. Afterwards audience members will be encouraged to share their opinions and experiences, ask questions, and discuss the changes being seen throughout the Cincinnati region as the demographics of neighborhoods continue to shift.

To attend the play and receive a 15% discount on tickets in Zones 2 and 3 of the theater, visit the Playhouse website at www.cincyplay.com and enter the promo code: HOME. Subject to availability, groups of 15 or more may get a larger discount by calling Piper Davis, group sales, at 513-977-2002.

Although the Feb. 6 forum is free, reservations are requested. Please call Myra Calder, HOME consumer education specialist, at 513-977-2623 or send her an email at myra.calder@homecincy.org.