



## **Open Communities educates, advocates and organizes to promote just & inclusive communities in north suburban Chicago**

Founded in 1972 by north suburban residents and congregations, we are a nonprofit, membership-based organization dedicated to fostering economically and culturally diverse communities. Open Communities is rooted in the civil rights movement when a group of local women organized the North Shore Summer Project to protest housing discrimination. The group culminated its activities with a rally on the Winnetka Village Green in 1965, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to a crowd of 10,000, his first civil rights rally in an all-white suburb. We educate, advocate and organize in the name of social justice, working collaboratively with current and prospective residents, local groups and municipalities.

### **Our Credo: Inclusive and Diverse Communities are Healthy, Robust and Right**

Why Open Communities? The name says it all. An inclusive and diverse community is one which is affirmatively welcoming, with an infrastructure that accommodates families of all incomes and types, people with disabilities, adolescents and seniors, and immigrants. Open Communities is poised to deepen its involvement in issues the agency has already explored, by popular demand locally, such as immigrant leadership development, school funding reform, and improved access to public transit.

Our commitment to housing justice remains as steadfast as it was when we were called the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs. Communities are richer when those who give to the northern suburbs also live here.

### **The Justice Project: The March Continues**

*The Justice Project: The March Continues* is one of the most ambitious initiatives Open Communities has undertaken, a new grassroots social justice movement that is reshaping the ideals of our founders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Justice Project is a grassroots social justice movement that has established “Principles for a Welcoming Community” that set out the framework by which municipalities can evaluate themselves in order to become more accessible, safe and engaged; and by which residents can hold their elected and appointed representatives accountable. Justice Teams have formed in much of Open Communities’ service area to create local advocacy campaigns.

### **What We Do**

Open Communities promotes its mission through Services, Advocacy, Education & Organizing. See next page.

## **Services:**

**Fair Housing Enforcement and Education:** Open Communities conducts housing discrimination investigation, provides housing rights education and referrals, and assists municipalities.

**Foreclosure & Predatory Lending Prevention:** Open Communities provides community outreach, education on options, referrals, loan document review, and negotiation with lenders to help prevent homeowners from losing their homes.

**Landlord/Tenant Complaint Investigation:** Open Communities provides information and referrals to tenants regarding security deposits and helps resolve disputes around repairs and evictions. Where concerns are building-wide, Open Communities organizes tenants to collectively assert their rights.

**Homesharing:** Open Communities matches residents who have room to share with renters who need a safe and affordable living space.

## **Advocacy/Education/Organizing:**

**Immigrant Leadership Development:** Open Communities works with others to facilitate workshops for immigrants on self-expression, how to participate in local government, and ways to influence policies related to diversity and inclusion.

**Affordable Housing Advocacy:** Open Communities works with local and regional groups to advance affordable housing programs and policies, and facilitate grassroots support for bricks-and-mortar developments.

**Community Education:** Open Communities conducts public education programs to promote understanding and support for fair and affordable housing among governmental bodies, real estate agencies, religious congregations, other local groups, and the general public.

**Community Organizing:** Open Communities is a vehicle for residents of all backgrounds to come together to prevent displacement and act as a “welcome movement” for equitable policies in housing, economic and social justice.

Our service area comprises the northern Cook and southern Lake County municipalities of Deerfield, Des Plaines, Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Highwood, Kenilworth, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Northfield, Park Ridge, Skokie, Wilmette, and Winnetka.

*All of our services are confidential and provided free of charge. Donations are welcome.*

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