

FORMERLY
Interfaith Housing
Center of the
Northern
Suburbs



OPEN COMMUNITIES

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly."
– **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**



Get Involved!

- **Join Open Communities.** You will receive a membership card, a magnet that you can proudly place on your refrigerator or car, and the satisfaction of knowing that you are an ambassador of welcome in the northern suburbs. A regular individual membership is \$75, or \$10 for students and low-income persons.
- **Become a Fair Housing Tester** and earn a modest stipend while providing a valuable service. This is one way we investigate housing discrimination.
- **Join HousingMatters.net.** It's one-click advocacy that works! Action alerts inform you about critical housing issues in Illinois and allow you to contact your legislators directly. It's free, easy, quick, and it multiplies your voice.
- **Advocate for Affordable Housing.** See page 8.
- **Display the poster** in this publication – our collective vision for an open and inclusive north suburban community.



Acknowledgements

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Non-discrimination

Open Communities does not discriminate in admission to programs or treatment of employment in programs or activities in compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act; the U.S. Civil Rights Act; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; the Age Discrimination Act; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; and the U.S. and Illinois constitutions. If you feel that you have been discriminated against, you have the right to file a complaint with the Illinois Department of Aging. Call 1-800-252-8966 (voice and TDD) or contact Open Communities.

We are Open Communities



THE NAME SAYS IT ALL.

It succinctly reflects our values and our vision since opening our doors. Our roots as a housing justice agency are in the Civil Rights Movement, when acts of racial and religious discrimination pervaded the suburbs. A group of women and clergy organized the North Shore Summer Project in 1961 to act as the vehicle for social change. That campaign evolved into the North Shore Interfaith Housing Council in 1972, the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs in 1986, and in 2012, Open Communities.

Today, the main obstacle to diverse communities is an atmosphere of exclusivity, complemented by costly housing and unequal access to quality education, transportation networks, youth programming, and cultural amenities.

Our commitment to housing justice remains steadfast. In broadening our mission to address other economic and social policies that influence the diversity of a community, we aim to set an example for the nation of grassroots suburban advocacy that promotes welcoming communities.

We remain driven by our founders' progressive energy and fearlessness to help communities, grassroots groups and individuals create an inclusive, interconnected and open North Shore. Communities are richer when those who give to the northern suburbs also live here.

We speak for fair housing rights in any language

FAIR HOUSING FACT SHEETS IN SEVEN LANGUAGES

Open Communities wants to ensure that everybody knows their Fair Housing Rights, regardless of the language they speak.

To help accomplish this goal, Open Communities has created Fair Housing Fact Sheets in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Polish, Russian and Urdu. Open Communities developed these Fact Sheets under a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Fair Housing Initiatives Program, and they are available on our website:

- Fair Housing and Older Adults
- Fair Housing and Manufactured/Mobile Home Communities
- Fair Housing and Condominium and Homeowners' Associations
- Fair Housing and Survivors of Domestic Violence
- Fair Lending

“Denying housing because a person does not speak English well violates the Fair Housing Act,” said John Trasviña, HUD Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity.

Contact us about housing discrimination. People who believe they have experienced or witnessed unlawful housing discrimination should contact Open Communities at (847) 501-5760, ext 408.

Open Communities launched

The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs is now “Open Communities.”

On October 28, 2012, the agency announced this transformation at a public gathering on at the DoubleTree Hotel in Skokie, where over 100 people from throughout the area gathered to launch a new “Welcome Movement” on the North Shore.

In congratulating Open Communities, the two keynote speakers, S. Alan Ray, President of Elmhurst College, and Dawn Turner Trice of the *Chicago Tribune*, spoke of the importance of inclusion instead of separating the haves from the have-nots, a gulf that is widening.

To foster inclusive and diverse communities, beyond fair housing enforcement and advocating for affordable housing, the northern suburbs must look at transportation networks, youth programming, job opportunities and cultural amenities, and a complementary commitment to openness. This was reinforced by the study the Interfaith Housing Center released earlier in October, completed under a HUD grant, of outsider perspectives of the northern suburbs. “This is the new fair housing frontier,” says executive director Gail Schechter.



“We shape our communities and afterward, they shape us,”

– Dawn Turner Trice

“[Communities must] empower members of socially marginalized groups to define and state their own agendas and take for themselves the leading role in working them out.”

– Dr. S. Alan Ray



Join Us for the Rayna & Marvin Miller

Housing Justice Award Benefit

Without picking up a hammer and without being “professionals,” the Miller Award winners have made a tangible difference that allowed low-income people, people of color, and people with disabilities to live in Chicago’s northern suburbs.... Just like our founders, Rayna and Marvin Miller.

Wednesday, May 29, 2013, 6:30-8:30 pm
Park Center, Glenview Park District
2400 Chestnut Avenue, Glenview

To buy tickets or become a sponsor, contact Molly Bougearel, mbouge13@gmail.com or (847) 501-5760, ext. 410.

MILLER AWARD BENEFIT CO-SPONSORS (to date):



Open Communities 9th Annual Fair Housing Month Event

Connecting Neighbors: Stories from the Front Porch

A STORYTELLING EVENT featuring:

- Sue O’Halloran
- Arif Choudhury
- Lowell Thompson

Wednesday, April 24, 6:30 – 8:30pm
Wilmette Public Library
1242 Wilmette Avenue, Wilmette

RSVP to casey@open-communities.org or call (847) 501-5760, ext. 501.



What we can do.



OPEN
COMMUNITIES

THE INCLUSIVE



What it looks like.

Community integration programming
Public services available to all
Ability to finish school

Immigration

Mass transit encouraged
Open space maximized
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Energy-efficient
Local food

Environment

Earth and life-friendly jobs
Union-friendly employers
Live-near-work options
Respect for all workers
Living wage

JOBS

Tenant/landlord open communication
Domestic violence victims protected
Children protected from violence
No racial profiling by police
Block watches
Trust of neighbor

Public Safety

Roads maintained in ALL neighborhoods
Bicycling and walking made easy
Access for elderly and disabled
Sensible schedules and fares
Sensible bus & train routes,

Transportation

Rental and homeownership options
Seniors with extended families
No gated neighborhoods
Accessible to disabled
All price points
Open to all

HOUSING

Local boards & parties reflect population
Education on issues
Voting is high
Transparent

CIVIC Engagement

Teachers of diverse backgrounds
Parent involvement encouraged
Interface with community
Qualified teachers
Every child valued

Public Schools

All cultures celebrated
Small businesses encouraged
Open expression

Culture Arts and Shopping

& DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Open Communities Programs



Homesharing Program: Celebrating a Four-Year Match

Sandra, a homeowner in Highland Park, came to us in 2008 in need of extra income to pay her mortgage. Jackie Grossmann, our Homesharing Coordinator, introduced her to Ivy, relocating from Wisconsin for a job. Ivy wanted a decent affordable room to rent for a few months. Four years later, Sandra and Ivy are still Homesharing together and have developed a close friendship. Sandra says, *"We love to garden, visit the Botanic Gardens and to cook together and – added bonus – Ivy is a very good influence as far as exercising is concerned! We feel like family. I never expected this from renting out a room...it is something precious and wonderful. I believe that we will always be friends – thanks to the Homesharing Program!"*

Landlord/Tenant Program: Tenants Empowered

Despite repeated requests, the new landlord of a Bosnian family in Skokie would not fix window blinds, the kitchen faucet, carbon monoxide detectors, and and faulty light switches, drains and doors. He even threatened to evict the tenants if they did not sign a new lease with a higher rent.

Brendan Saunders of our staff advised the tenants about the "repair and deduct" procedure, a process of writing a formal request for repairs and giving the landlord fourteen days to fix the violation. If the repair is not made, the tenants can have it completed professionally, and deduct the cost from their rent, up to \$500 or a half-month's rent, whichever is less.

So the family sent a "repair and deduct" warning letter. After this was also ignored, the tenants completed the repairs themselves and shared this procedure with their neighbors who followed suit.

"I am taking this opportunity to thank you and Open Communities for the advice offered. Without it, we might have chosen wrong avenues and may have been evicted. My family and I appreciate all your help and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Foreclosure Prevention Program: Evanston Hardship Averted

Among those hardest hit since the housing market collapse were seasonal construction workers. This was the case for Jamaican immigrants Palma Wallace, her husband and their four children, Evanston homeowners since 2002.

When Palma came to Open Communities, the family was two years' delinquent on their mortgage. They tried explaining the situation to Chase Bank, their mortgage holder, and negotiate a new rate "but to no avail," said Palma. Anna Dominov, Housing Counselor for Open Communities, assisted her to get a trial loan modification in January 2013 through the Making Home Affordable Program, and protection from foreclosure under the Cook County Circuit Court Foreclosure Mediation Program until the modification becomes permanent.

"I just want to say a huge Thank You for assisting me in getting a modification. At a point in my life when I thought that all efforts were to no result, my light became brighter. Anna is always ready, willing and able to assist. I know this will carry Open Communities a far way because of the wonderful skills she possesses and the work she does."

Fair Housing Program: Opening Doors for Families

A white Chicago family looking for housing in Evanston came to us in frustration: they were turned away from their "perfect" apartment. The landlord told them that he would not rent them the three-bedroom apartment because they had six people in their family, two parents and four children. He said he thought they would not be happy there.

Concerned about possible fair housing discrimination based on presence of children, Viki arranged a site visit to the apartment with the landlord and Evanston building inspectors to resolve the situation. Indeed, the inspectors determined that the apartment was big enough for the family.

Thanks to the fair housing education and community-building effort of Open Communities, the landlord presented the family with lease and they moved into the housing of their choice.



Immigrant Leadership Development: Learning Then Teaching

Elena Sayed moved to Skokie from St. Petersburg three years ago with her Pakistani husband and two of their three children, and she was overwhelmed – “in a mist,” as she describes it. The language, the way of life, the neighborhoods were completely new.

Fortunately, one of Elena’s first steps was to visit the Niles Township Schools’ English Language Learner ELL Parent Center in Skokie, founded by the Township’s school districts in 2008 to serve the largest growing population of immigrants and refugees in the Chicagoland area.

Last October, Open Communities worked with the Center to launch a writing project, funded under a grant by the Sally Mead Hands Foundation, aimed at encouraging immigrants to express their sentiments, concerns and struggles by writing. This in turn would encourage them to take ownership of their own community and engage in shaping it. Elena is one of over a dozen parents in the weekly writing group, from countries ranging from Kyrgyzstan to Egypt and from Poland to Mexico. It is facilitated by Dr. Janise Hurtig of the Community Writing and Research Project, affiliated with the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Since the first day, Elena used the Tuesday writing workshop to improve her English and celebrate her two worlds.

When Elena learned about a new program at the Center – the Parent Mentor Program, in which immigrant parents assist classroom teachers at two Skokie elementary schools, Devonshire and Madison – she immediately applied to participate.

Now, besides learning, Elena is able to teach, as she is one of the eight Parent Mentors at Devonshire School, where one of her daughters is enrolled. Elena is sharing her experience at a classroom, working with children and side-by-side with teachers, and speaking in public.

Her positive perspective is infectious, and even a jaded Chicagoan in the middle of winter cannot help but be won over: “I would like to say that before I came to the U.S.A., I imagined this country as a ‘sunny beach.’ My imagination became

a reality because in Chicago there are a lot of sunny days. Sun has positive influences to my mood. I like sun. I like Lake Michigan and its light blue water like in the sea. I like the huge different flowers which decorate city and suburbs. I like smiling people who are very friendly and polite. I enjoy living here. I feel comfortable because of the beauty, nice people; and a good environment makes excellent emotions.”

A World of Parents at Open Communities

Open Communities is proud to have opened the door for a tried-and-true program that helps immigrants and long-time north suburban residents come together through the schools.

Open Communities is the Center’s fiscal agent for the Niles Township Parents’ ELL Center in Skokie as it implements the Parent Mentor Program in two Skokie elementary schools, Devonshire and Madison.

The goal of the Parent Mentor project is, simply, to help students by helping parents. Immigrant and low-income parents are generally less involved in their children’s schooling than native born and more affluent parents. By engaging parents in the classroom and learning more about their own neighborhoods and opportunities to get involved, they in turn, help their children succeed. They spend two hours a day, four days a week in classrooms, assisting teachers and giving individualized attention to children. Funding comes from the Illinois State Board of Education, with Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights as the administrator.

“Our Parent Mentor program means family partnerships and compassion,” aptly summarizes Chelsey Maxwell, Principal of Madison School. From her perspective, Subia Javed, a parent mentor, adds, “Being a part of this program I am now a part of our community.”



Skokie Parent Mentors visit Open Communities in February 2012. Elena Sayed is standing 2nd from right)



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Display the poster

about our collective vision for an open and inclusive north suburban community. (page 4 & 5)

Housing Burden Grows in Northern Suburbs

Nearly one in three homeowners and half of renters in the northern suburbs are struggling to afford their housing. This level of need is unprecedented in this Chicago sub-region, known for its strong job base. Today, 50,232 households are paying more than 35% of their incomes in housing costs compared to 22,444 in 1990.

Why has housing need worsened?

- *One factor is catering exclusively to the luxury market. Since 1990, 26,700 homes and condos were developed, with the average sales prices rising 100% to \$500,000. However, the region experienced a net loss of 4,000 rentals.*
- *The nature of housing as a financial investment, particularly in this lucrative region, fueled the burst of the housing bubble. Families at all incomes were leveraged over their head, and if they lost their jobs, they were stuck with unaffordable mortgages, their devalued houses becoming liabilities. More than 15,000 families in the northern suburbs have lost their homes to foreclosure since 2005.*
- *Misunderstanding and fear of mixed-income housing hurts everyone, including long-time residents. A popular perception is that affordable housing is an unfair tampering with the “free market.” But there is no “free market.”*

Government regulates everything from lot size to zoning districts, from traffic patterns to building materials. These restrictions affect the price and type of housing. A well-maintained, fully occupied housing stock is what raises property values, regardless of the income of those who live in it.

The result is a completely unbalanced local economy that favors those at the very top.

Different professions command different salaries. If we value the cashier as much as the banker, we can make room for them. We need to change our perspective on what “housing” is all about, and what our communities are for. Housing should be the platform for raising healthy children and nurturing familial and social relationships, not merely a financial investment.

What you can do.

- **Be educated.** Contact Open Communities for information on housing need and solutions.
- **Tell your suburb that you support affordable and accessible housing – preserving it or building it.** It doesn't have to be more than a two-sentence e-mail.
- **Vote your values.** Vote for candidates who support affordable and fair housing.