

NORTHWEST FAIR HOUSING ALLIANCE COMMUNITY SURVEY & NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This report (issued on May 19, 2003) is the first comprehensive review of NFHA services to the community as seen through the eyes of the recipients of those services. The report was compiled by Barbara Ritter, MA and Cathy McEnderfer, MSW and was funded by the City of Spokane, Community Development Department: Community Development Block Grant.

The intent of the study was to be used as a planning tool and needs assessment for Northwest Fair Housing Alliance. It is intended to be a catalyst for conversation and action for the agency and related systems.

The specific objectives of the Study were threefold:

- To identify the gaps in services and concerns related to fair housing within Spokane.
- To assess the perception of NWFHA by community stakeholders and consumers including what they find most helpful and what they would change, and finally
- To tell the fair housing story from the consumer's perspective.

Overview of services provided by NWFHA:

NWFHA is a non-profit agency dedicated to ending illegal discrimination and enforcing the Fair Housing Act for residents of Eastern Washington. Activities of the Alliance include:

- Investigation of complaints regarding fair housing issues.
- Advocacy for individuals experiencing difficulties with fair housing issues.
- Basic and tailored education for both consumers and providers of housing related services.
- Information about and referral to regional housing service providers, attorneys, and state, local or federal agencies.
- Mediation and support with litigation.

For consumers, who come to NWFHA for help, mediation, litigation, advocacy typically results in one or more of six basic outcomes: A unit is obtained for a person/family seeking housing, a unit is retained for a person/family at risk for losing housing, investigation results in a "cause finding" leading to reasonable accommodation or compensation, an investigation leads to "no cause finding" and the complaint is dropped, and finally the NWFHA provides support with information and referral addressing a variety of consumer and housing provider needs.

Inland Empire Rental Association participated in the Community Survey as a stakeholder /housing provider.

The questions allowed us to share our concerns regarding fair housing in the Spokane area, as well as relate how we heard about NWFHA and what our knowledge/experience

re: fair housing laws were prior to that contact. Most of you know that this writer was a virtual novice when she took this job, so the NWFHA has been invaluable in terms of personal education and arranging classes for our new members.

The survey asked if my knowledge had improved, how I rated the information provided to us, and how I used the information I received. I was able to rate the services provided, my perception of their knowledge of the fair housing laws, their presentations, materials, and support in resolutions of housing problems. I was able to point out what was most useful/beneficial about my experience with the agency, what was least useful and make suggestions for improved services.

Since 2000, NWFHA has been able to establish an automated database of the fair housing complaints received by the agency. Only complaints alleging a violation of the fair housing laws were recorded in the data base. Landlord – tenant issues were not counted here.

What is significant is that there is evidence of a rise in the total numbers of complaints received each fiscal year over time. The majority of the complaints fell into the category of coming from persons with disabilities as well as national origin.

This can mean that the agency has a more noticeable public presence, and therefore captures more data than in the past... and that there has always been a significant existing level of discrimination experiences simply unreported in the past.

Either way, it behooves us as an association to make additional efforts to make sure that our members are fully knowledgeable about the reality and myths of the fair housing laws. We will try to run articles each month in the Rental Review as a way to reach that goal.

Editors Note: Space restrictions prevented the printing of the entire report. Important highlights will be included in this issue and coming issues by the editor. Copies of the report may be obtained by contacting the Northwest Fair Housing Alliance at 325-2665 or check out www.nationalfairhousing.org.