Shanna Smith Speaks to Sold Out Lakeshore Breakfast

The FHCWM and Lakeshore Advisory Board hosted the 10th Annual Lakeshore Friends of Fair Housing: Opening Doors to Housing Choice Breakfast on Thursday, October 13, 2016 in Holland. This year’s event featured a keynote speech by Shanna Smith, President/CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA). Ms. Smith provided a thorough update on fair housing cases and HUD issued guidance as well as highlighting current fair housing trends, such as the lack of protections for the LGBTQ community. She also discussed NFHA’s relationship with realtors, lenders and home insurance providers as past defendants turned partners working together to improve equal housing opportunity through the development of best practices.

The FHCWM was very pleased to have hosted Ms. Smith and a sold out audience this year!

This event was made possible with the help of our sponsors: City of Holland, Chemical Bank, Flagstar Bank, West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS, Independent Bank, West Michigan Community Bank, and The Brooks Family Community Fund. Your support and dedicated interest in furthering fair housing along the Lakeshore is truly appreciated. Thank you very much!

Fair Housing Award

The 2016 Lakeshore Fair Housing Award was presented to Jennifer Boerman of Community Action House (CAH) for her passion for fair housing advocacy. She is the Associate Director of Community Action House; she received the award for her dedication and commitment to raising community awareness about fair housing rights and responsibilities.

Thank you and congratulations, Jennifer Boerman!

FHCWM at Boys & Girls Clubs

The staff of FHCWM again provided educational programming using The Fair Housing Five & the Haunted House and other fair housing-themed books to members of the Boys & Girls Clubs in Grand Rapids with the help of Seidman Club Director, Derrick Owens, and Paul I. Phillips Education Coordinator, LaShaunda Hoskins.

Fair housing education empowers families to recognize what housing discrimination looks like today as well as to exercise their rights. By having a full understanding of fair housing, families with children can better access quality, affordable housing thereby promoting financial stability and economic security. The FHCWM staff gave all 92 participants a variety of educational materials to take home and share with parents, caregivers, and other family members. Through this continued partnership, the FHCWM has provided meaningful information and fun, interactive experiences to the members of the Boys & Girls Club that increased community knowledge and created positive momentum.

The FHCWM will continue to work with students as the school year progresses and looks forward to providing fair housing education to aspiring civil rights advocates. Please contact the FHCWM to participate!

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Our mission is to prevent and eliminate housing discrimination and ensure equal housing opportunity through education, advocacy and enforcement.
Membership Update
Thanks to the generous support of the Center’s members, $9,800 has been raised since launching the 2016 Membership Drive! Membership dollars help support the educational initiatives the Center provides to further educate the community and home seekers. So far this year, member support has provided educational activities to the Boys & Girls Clubs in Grand Rapids as well as training for community members and housing advocates. If you are interested in helping further our efforts to reach the community, there are a few different ways you can help!

♦ Become a member today by either filling out the member envelope included with your newsletter or visit http://www.fhcwm.org/giving.

♦ Become a sponsor for our Spring or Fall event, which reach a combined audience of over 600 housing professionals, social service staff, community members, and home seekers!

♦ Donate your talents by becoming a volunteer tester (see more information on the back of the newsletter).

♦ You can also attend the FHCWM book clubs, hosted in Holland and at the FHCWM office in Grand Rapids. Whether your support is monetary, through volunteering, and/or advocating on our behalf, the FHCWM wants to thank you for being a voice for fair housing!

Local Fair Housing News
The board and staff of the FHCWM are very pleased to announce the U. S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) awarded the Center two grants under the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP), one a continuation of a three-year grant focused on enforcement and the other a new one-year grant for education and outreach. The grant funds will be used to provide comprehensive fair housing services throughout a 12 county service area, including investigating allegations of housing discrimination and providing unique education and outreach opportunities. The FHCWM looks forward to continuing to provide these much-needed services as well as substantially increasing its educational opportunities and outreach in 2017.

49507! Project Report Released

In 2013, the FHCWM joined the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) and 19 of its members in a partnership with Wells Fargo NA, for resources to promote homeownership, strengthen neighborhoods and promote diverse communities. Based on several years of professional investigation, this agreement settled a 2012 federal fair housing complaint filed with the US Dept. of Housing & Urban Development. The FHCWM, NFHA and its members alleged illegal racial and national origin discrimination based on significant differences in maintenance and marketing of properties in predominantly White versus African-American and Latino neighborhoods in the Grand Rapids metro area, along with other sites throughout the country. The FHCWM received $1.42 million for a neighborhood stabilization effort and $170,000 in agency damages from Wells Fargo, as part of the $42 million total settlement. Based on identified needs resources were directed to a small, densely populated area in the 49507 zip code. The 2-year project focused on Housing and Homeownership; Health, Education, and Safety; and Economic & Environmental Development. Read the report:

http://www.fhcwm.org/community.

A special thank you to all the partners who took part on this important project to reinvest and revitalize the 49507 neighborhood!

The Fair Housing Center of West Michigan has a Facebook Page! Take a moment to find us and like our page.

Find us on Facebook

Fair Housing Center of West Michigan
20 Hall Street SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
T: (616) 451-2980 or 1-866-389-FAIR

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...FHCWM Notes & News...

$11,000
$9,800

Protected classes under law include race, color, national origin, religion, family status, marital status, gender, age and disability.
September 2016 - HUD published two new pieces of guidance entitled:

1) Fair Housing Act Application to the Enforcement of Local Nuisance and Crime-Free Housing Ordinances Against Victims of Domestic Violence, Other Crime Victims, and Others Who Require Police or Emergency Services; and

2) Fair Housing Act Protections for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

(1) A growing number of local governments are enacting a variety of nuisance ordinances that can affect housing in potentially discriminatory ways; nuisance conduct often includes what is characterized by the ordinance as an “excessive” number of calls for emergency police or ambulance services, typically defined as just a few calls within a specified period of time. Studies have found that victims of domestic violence often do not report their initial incident of domestic violence and instead suffer multiple assaults before contacting the police or seeking a protective order or other assistance; some may be hesitant or afraid to identify themselves as victims of abuse.

Nuisance and “crime-free” housing ordinances are becoming an additional factor that operates to discourage victims from reporting domestic violence and obtaining the emergency police and medical assistance they need. Some of these ordinances penalize housing providers who fail to evict tenants when a tenant, resident or other person has allegedly engaged in a violation of law, regardless of whether the resident was the victim or perpetrator of the crime at issue. Local government’s policies and practices to address nuisances, including enactment or enforcement of a nuisance or crime-free housing ordinance, violate the Fair Housing Act when they have an unjustified discriminatory effect, even when there was no intent to discriminate.

Inappropriate enforcement of nuisance and crime-free ordinances can penalize individuals for use of emergency services or for being a victim of domestic violence or other crimes. Many victims are women, and in some communities, racial and ethnic populations are disproportionately victimized by crime. Repealing such ordinances that may result in evictions or create disparities in access to emergency services can help prevent violations of the Fair Housing Act.

(2) Limited English Proficiency or LEP refers to a person’s limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. Individuals who are LEP are not a protected class under the Act but housing providers are prohibited from using someone’s LEP status as a pretext for discrimination because of a protected class. Due to the close link between LEP and certain racial and national origin groups, restrictions on access to housing based on LEP may disproportionately burden certain protected classes.

Blanket refusals to deal with LEP persons in the housing context is strongly is discouraged. LEP persons may speak English well enough to conduct essential housing-related matters or have a household member who can provide language assistance. Selective application of a language-related policy as a pretext for unequal treatment against certain racial or ethnic groups, violates the Act.

In addition to providing the aforementioned guidance, HUD has provided a three step analysis in each of these documents to help determine whether a claim of discrimination or disparate impact may exist in any policy or practice that may be in question. To see these analyses and learn more, download these and other best practice materials from our website: www.fhcwm.org.

Client Corner

The FHCWM was contacted by a couple who were denied approval to build a wheelchair ramp in front of their rental home. The husband’s mobility was decreasing and he was expected to be fully reliant on a wheelchair within a few weeks. He would need a ramp to get in and out of the house. The couple turned to the FHCWM for guidance on how they could assert their fair housing rights. After, their request for a reasonable modification for permission to install the ramp was unlawfully denied by the housing provider. The FHCWM assisted the couple in filing an administrative complaint with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. Shortly after filing, the housing provider agreed to allow the couple to build the wheelchair ramp in front of their home.

“Because of the service of the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan, my husband and I can now get in and out of our home much easier and can enjoy life outside of our four walls again.” - Client Testimonial
30th Annual Fair Housing Luncheon & Workshop Series  
**Thursday, April 27, 2017**

Please mark your calendars for this exciting educational event, which due to increasing demand, will be held at the **Amway Grand Hotel** in downtown Grand Rapids. As always, we will have a variety of comprehensive morning workshops as well as a luncheon keynote speaker. Please mark your calendars! Please contact the FHCWM at (616) 451-2980 or (866) 389-FAIR if you are interested in receiving information about or sponsoring this event!

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<th><strong>Fair Housing Book Club</strong></th>
<th><strong>Fair Housing Trainings</strong></th>
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<td>The FHCWM Book Clubs have been reading some great books: <em>The Turner House</em> by Angela Flournoy and <em>Some of My Best Friends are Black</em> by Tanner Colby. Read along with us: <a href="http://www.fhcwm.org/booksweveread">www.fhcwm.org/booksweveread</a> or send an email request to <a href="mailto:contact-us@fhcwm.org">contact-us@fhcwm.org</a> to be added to our Book Club email alerts! We meet at 11:45 am in our office (20 Hall Street SE, Grand Rapids) or the Coldwell Banker office (466 E. 16th St. Holland). Bring a lunch, a friend and join the discussion!</td>
<td>The Fair Housing Center offers fair housing trainings, including Fair Housing &amp; Advertising, Fair Housing Training for Rental Professionals, <strong>Reasonable Accommodations &amp; Modifications</strong>, and Fair Lending sessions. Costs vary depending on the type of training. Each training is 3 hours and includes a comprehensive packet of reference materials. Some sessions are held at the FHCWM office; we can also come to your location. Call Madelaine Clapp at (616) 451-2980 to learn more or register. <strong>Check our website home page for upcoming dates: <a href="http://www.fhcwm.org">www.fhcwm.org</a>.</strong> The FHCWM hosts <strong>tester trainings</strong> each month. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a stipend in return for their time and services. In order to accommodate differing schedules, one training will take place during business hours while the other will be held in the evening. For the specific training dates, to register, or any other questions contact Gabe Chapla at (616) 451-2980.</td>
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