

The Fair Housing Act Turns 50

By Kineta Sanford and Emily Seibel

2018 marks the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and is as relevant today as it was then. Where we live matters. In the United States today, life expectancy can be correlated to zip code. Fair Housing is about equality and inclusion across place. Yellow Springs celebrates a history of inclusion, offering some of the first non-segregated housing in the region. Early public housing policy in the United States, however, promoted and celebrated segregation.

THE HISTORY

In 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards Code of Ethics prohibited integration, guiding realtors to refrain from introducing members of “any race of nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.” By 1936, the Federal Housing Administration was established and its Underwriting Manual promoted racial segregation, promoting racially restrictive covenants to guarantee the most “favorable condition” for neighborhoods, noting that deed restrictions should include race restrictions to prevent “devaluation of a neighborhood” due to “inharmonious racial groups” and “incompatible racial elements.”

Despite a seldom-enforced and difficult to use Civil Rights Act of 1866, housing segregation became a critical priority for advancing racist ideologies due to the influence of residence on other types of segregation including education and finance. Residential segregation also facilitated voting rights violations and made district gerrymandering easier. For this reason Dr. King and civil rights leaders pressed for a federal housing law that would carry with it the backing, weight and power of the United States government. The Fair Housing Act would protect people from discrimination when renting, buying or securing financing for any type of housing, anywhere.

THE ACT

The law was finally created in response to the tragic assassination of Dr. King. On April 4, 1968 Dr. King was assassinated. Written by senators from both parties, the Fair Housing Act languished in Congress for years. After Dr. King’s assassination, Congress faced mounting pressure to pass the act and seven days later, on April 11, 1968, President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act into law.

The Fair Housing Act since then has gone through many interpretations, court cases, challenges, tests, and alterations including adding sex (1974), disability (1988), and familial status (1988) as protected classes. The Act also protects people because of race, color, national origin, and religion. In 2013, HUD passed disparate impact regulations, which were affirmed by the Supreme Court in 2015. The Court acknowledged the Act’s continuing role in moving the Nation toward a more integrated society.

YELLOW SPRINGS HOME, INC. AND FAIR HOUSING

Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, Yellow Springs Home, Inc. included racial and economic integration in its original articles of incorporation. To meet its commitment to Fair Housing principles, Yellow Springs Home, Inc. conducted an analysis of racial and ethnic demographics in Yellow Springs, compared with the broader region. Kineta Sanford, AmeriCorps VISTA, is implementing an Affirmative Marketing and Outreach program, which identifies community contacts of under-represented groups and those more likely to be impacted by housing discrimination, such as victims of domestic violence and LGBTQ+ populations.

AFFIRMATIVE MARKETING AND OUTREACH

Affirmative marketing is the act of going out of one's way to seek out groups of people who are least likely to apply to the program and are often discriminated against in housing, including racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities (physical and developmental), families with children, and seniors. For Home, Inc., it means finding organizations in the community and in the Greater Dayton region that are dedicated to supporting each of these underrepresented groups and connecting with them to help spread our mission.

Some of the organizations contacted in the community include: the 365 Project, the YS Senior Center, the James A. McKee Association, and the Central Chapel AME Church. Some of the organizations outside of Yellow Springs contacted include Welcome Dayton, the Goodwill Easter Seals of the Miami Valley, St. Teresa Church, PACO of Dayton, the Greene County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and a number of other groups.

Home, Inc. clients typically apply for the program based on word-of-mouth, so affirmative marketing and outreach is a powerful way to reach under-represented groups through personal contacts and referrals. The goal is to reach out to the people who would normally miss out on this word-of-mouth opportunity and create lasting relationships with organizations whose missions align with Home, Inc.'s commitment to strengthening community and diversity.

This effort is grassroots— staff members are calling, emailing, and meeting with other organizations to distribute information about Home, Inc. programs and projects. We are also advertising Yellow Springs as a welcoming community and looking for feedback about how to support the needs of various groups such as refugees. This work is critically important and meets the spirit and intent of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Although housing equality has come a long way since then, there is still a lot of work to be done to make housing fair, accessible, affordable, and equitable to ALL people.

Source: National Fair Housing Alliance