

Eliminating Barriers to Homeownership For Immigrants, New Americans and People of Color

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Statistical reports and studies have suggested a population explosion in our nation over the next 40 years, due to migration of people from across regions. The preservation of open space, too many people and nowhere to put them is an ongoing concern for cities such as New York.

This is a problem that needs a solution!

NHSJ's Mission

Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica, Inc., (NHSJ) is a 44 year old non-profit organization committed to preserving, protecting, and revitalizing neighborhoods, through increasing: homeownership, community development and investment in southern Queens. By methods of housing education, counseling and financial services to low-to-moderate income residents thus allowing people access to sustainable, affordable housing in southern Queens.

Equity and the work of NHSJ

Equity in our organization is defined by the **value of the work** that we do. We put emphasis on the **quality of services we provide**. We go above and beyond considering a holistic approach when we engage our customers.

The investments we make in our community are visible. They are investments that are sustainable. It promotes **growth in knowledge, self-sufficiency and changes family dynamics** in terms of educating the entire family on budgeting and the financial impact of the choices they make.

Equity in homeownership

NHSJ promotes **equity in homeownership** by reaching out to communities that are underserved and least likely to have access to services and information.

Recently, our staff has been trained by NYC Housing Preservation Development (HPD) as Housing Ambassadors. As such, we were asked to expand our services to another community district whose population was predominantly ‘immigrants’ to educate them on available affordable housing opportunities. This was an 80% Mandarin speaking community who have very limited English. Although we had a language barrier, we partnered with the local elected official who spoke the language and other community-based organizations that helped us achieve the goal.

NHSJ promotes equity in homeownership by going outside the box, partnering with local elected officials, other stakeholders and publishing information in various languages to reach the underserved communities.

The History of Homeownership in NHSJ's Service Area

- The history of homeownership in South Jamaica (includes Baisley, Foch, Linden, Guy R. Brewer, Sutphin and Rockaway Boulevards) has been a struggling predominantly Black community since the early 1930s that is continually evolving. Today, the area is largely a middle-class community consisting of suburban **one-and-two-family houses** ranging from colonials built around the 1960s to new developments.
- Because of **redlining in the area**, Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica was established in 1974 (as the 3rd of its kind in the nation) to combat **discriminatory practices by banks, insurance companies, etc.**, who refuse or limit loans, mortgages, insurance, etc. within this specific geographic area.
- The landscape has changed from predominantly **one- and two-family homes to multi-family buildings** to accommodate the large number of people moving in our area.
- What we have today is a melting pot of cultures and ethnic groups from around the world who are immigrants, new Americans and people of color, all seeking the American dream of homeownership.

Who do we serve?

NHSJ serves a diverse population –immigrants, new Americans and people of color, through referrals, word of mouth etc.

Who are the Immigrants?

They are of people or persons who make an international move with intent to settle or reside as permanent residents or naturalized citizens in the destination country. They are not natives and/or they do not possess citizenship; some take up employment as a migrant workers or temporarily as a foreign worker.

Who are the New Americans?

These are newly naturalized citizens and they have the ability to participate in the political process.

Who are People of Color?

These are non-white persons.

Key Findings: Challenges

Challenges faced by our clients

Global Challenges –we have no control

- Competing with Investors
- Income Guidelines being too low
- Lack of housing inventory
- Volatile Housing Market

Specific Challenges – we have some control

- Affordability
- Credit Challenges
- Lack of understanding of the home buying process
- Limited English proficiency (*LEP*)

Key Findings: Challenges (*continued*)

Rapidly changing demographics

- High housing prices are causing gentrification
- Rapidly appreciating home values/prices
- Divergent community – with various ethnic groups and different populations

Economic Barriers

- Employment – Clients inability to access high-paying jobs (Research shows that income disparities exist among communities of color)

Our Experience

- Our immigrant clients face the challenge of not having savings due to sending remittances home to their family
- Disparities in income based on Limited English Proficiency
- Most of the clients that we serve within these demographics are paying high rents and are experiencing high incidences of evictions

Solutions

We must have in place an outreach program to the community to serve the needs of the people. Perhaps by looking at non-traditional ways, we can accomplish the goal of eliminating barriers to homeownership for the underserved communities.

- Asking what are the **current trends** in our housing markets?
- Where is the **space** where the organization meets the people? (Accessibility)
- Are we representing diversity and inclusion as service providers?
- Are we adjusting our services to accommodate for language and culture of the diverse community to impact the future of our communities?
- Are we fostering community relationships, where no man is left behind? Or continue to exist in socially and economical disadvantaged communities.

We must create new building models that are conducive to serve peoples' need for housing, food etc. So we need to consider space and build structures that are modern and practical, that can include housing and other social services to address people's need.

Solutions *(Continued)*

- Plan for new developments in the community
- Need to educate the whole family on wealth building, maintain wealth and inter-generation wealth transfer
- Help clients to gain access to entitlement programs, such as
 - Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE)
 - Property tax exemption for homeowners
 - Available Grant opportunities
- Educate and inform the underserved community comprised of immigrants, new Americans and people of color through its language of choice
- Immigrants start participating in political process and be identified as a voting block
- Village Approach -Families have to learn how to stay together and work together
- The need to educate government on the value of eliminating “Barriers to Homeownership” for underserved communities as a cost-effective way that can greatly mitigate the impact on homelessness prevention.

Models

- New emphasis should be on educating families and that education needs to commence in high school -With financial literacy budget and credit)
- Home sharing for seniors and others
- Teach people how to be a good tenant – a good tenant program can help clients transfer from tenancy to homeownership
- Resources to provide money for homebuyers to purchase.

As such, it is established that our organization is tasked with meeting the needs of its people, in order to address these needs the organization must have a basic understanding of what these needs are.

Models (*Continued*)

Since our inception NHSJ has created programs to match the needs of the community. We partner with numerous developers to create affordable homeownership opportunities. We realized the need to teach homeowners to maintain their property and created the Handyman Training Certificate Program and the Rehab Loan Program.

In 2000 NHSJ started the Predatory Lending Task Force to brainstorm strategies for responding to the impending foreclosure crisis. These were state and city agencies and other community stakeholders coming together to prevent foreclosures in New York's low-income and minority communities. Because of our efforts, we were able to engage legal service providers and provided information and training for the judges and attorneys who were not familiar with how banks were handling loss mitigation.

We were part of the blueprint that started the settlement conference concept and advocated for clients to receive free legal assistance to deal with their foreclosure case, forcing lenders to change their loss mitigation options. As a result, in 2009 the government created HAMP (Home Affordable Modification Program). This product provided more options for clients to stay in their homes.

To-date we are still dealing with the effects of the foreclosure crisis.