AFFH Research and Resource Center:

Executive Summary

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This Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) project is a partnership between Geneva Human Rights Commission and Hobart and William Smith Colleges. The project is funded by a $65,000 FHAP Partnership grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the HUD grant was matched by the Colleges. The ultimate goal of the project is the creation of a regional AFFH Research and Resource Center in Geneva, NY.

The primary objective of our research is to compile data about regional agencies’ understanding and knowledge of AFFH guidelines. HUD requires that any program or agency receiving federal housing funds be obligated to AFFH and to be in compliance with the Fair Housing Act and other federal civil rights laws. In other words, organizations must proactively take steps to extend and enhance housing opportunities to all members of a community and eliminate discriminatory actions in all areas of the housing market. This includes private and public sectors.

We are engaged in Phase One of the project, which encompasses data collection and information gathering that will be analyzed in Phase II and used for the AFFH Resource Center. The data gathered for Phase I is the foundation for other phases to build off. The project is compiled of four phases and the final phase of this project is to establish an AFFH Resource Center for the Finger Lake Region. The goal of this research center is to foster a greater community understanding of the importance of fair housing choice and to develop resources for organizations and municipal agencies receiving federal assistance that will educate and encourage voluntary compliance with AFFH obligations and priorities.

Through our weekly meetings, we were able to establish a list of priorities for each week. We began by organizing all of the housing agencies that were receiving federal/state funds into a database. We then created a survey that would help us determine the level of AFFH- awareness
of the agencies. We asked questions about the kinds of fair housing practices that they were currently engaged in or planning to engage in. We also sent out letters to local banks in order to access their records of loan requests and approvals. This was so we could establish whether or not banks were practicing fair lending in the community. To address the issue of segregation in Geneva, we created a map that displayed the racial segregation within the city. We wanted to collect housing plans that would be used later on in the final phase. Using the Internet, we accessed housing plans that will be a part of the resource center. Since we could not find statistics in the 2010 census regarding handicapped-accessible housing, we sent out letters to local disability rights action non-profits.

The end goal of the AFFH Research Project is to provide the Finger Lakes region with an AFFH resource center. This will give agencies who receive state and federal dollars the accessible resources they need to maintain fair housing practices. We’ll use our database to contact these agencies and let them know that there is an AFFH resource center available in the future. We hope that the resources gathered in Phase One will be valuable assets to the development of the final AFFH Resource Center. Ideally, they will help agencies in the Finger Lakes Region to promote fair housing and encourage education and awareness about housing issues.