

Housing Rights **ADVOCATE**

Austin Tenants Council • Issue 91, Winter 2018

Expanding Opportunity in Central Texas

On November 8, 2018, the Community Advancement Network (CAN) hosted the Bridging The Economic Divide - Expanding Opportunity - Central Texas Regional Summit at the San Marcos Conference Center. In the ever-changing landscape of Central Texas, CAN brought together leaders from the five county Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Area to ponder two very important questions: 1. What role can expanding housing opportunities play in bridging the economic divide? and 2. What can be done to improve access to housing opportunities for working individuals and families? The answers to these questions will shape the future of our region.

During the summit, CAN celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Federal Fair Housing Act by recognizing the following agencies and collaboratives: Austin Tenants Council, ARCIL (A Resource Center for Independent Living), Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable, Texas Appleseed, Texas Housers, and Bastrop Community Cares. CAN also recognized the following

individuals for making fair housing a priority in their municipalities: Stacy Brown – City of San Marcos, Elizabeth Alvarado – City of Round Rock, Susan Watkins – City of Georgetown, and Gail McCant – City of Austin.

ATC would like to thank CAN for recognizing the work that we do on a daily basis to try to help Central Texans make sure that they have safe, decent and fair housing. We would also like to congratulate the other agencies and individuals that were recognized and thank them for all of their work to ensure that fair housing remains a priority in Central Texas.



ATC Welcomes New Executive Director

On December 1st, the Austin Tenants Council announced that its Board of Directors had chosen Jeannie Nelson to serve as the organization's new Executive Director. Nelson joins ATC following nearly three years as the Director of Dental Services at AIDS Services of Austin (ASA). Before work-

ing with ASA, Nelson was Lead Dental Hygienist at Austin Dental Arts. She also brings many years of experience working in human resources management.

"After a thorough search process, the Board is pleased to have found Jeannie Nelson as the best person to assume

Getting Through the Winter Months: Tips for Renters

It's wonderful to come in from the cold and take a warm shower or bath, but what if your water just won't warm up? All Texas tenants have a right to hot water that reaches a minimum temperature of 120°F. If your rental unit does not meet this standard, call our telephone counseling line (512-474-1961), reach out through online counseling, or schedule an appointment to talk about steps you can take to enforce your right to hot water.

Municipalities that have adopted the International Property Maintenance Code (IPCM), such as Austin and San Marcos, require landlords to provide heating facilities capable of maintaining a room temperature of 68°F. Even if you live outside of these cities, you may have a right to heating facilities based on your lease agreement or local ordinances. Reach out to us if you'd like to learn more about what your landlord must provide.

During the winter, you'll want to keep warm air in and cold air out of your rental unit. Check for air leaks and open spaces around exterior doors and windows. If you find any spaces that could allow heat to escape, such as a gap between your door and door frame, give us a call to talk about how you can request weatherstripping or caulking to seal your residence.

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leadership of this important Austin organization," said board chair Kate Moore. "Jeannie has 20 years of experience and the management skills to keep the organization healthy and growing. This, combined with her dedication to equity and social justice, makes Jeannie uniquely qualified to lead the Austin Tenants Council."

While Nelson's background involves work in several fields, she believes that "the common thread has been a desire to help others and an ability to develop teams and systems to achieve mission-driven, data-supported results." In particular, her work at AIDS Services of Austin prepared her for this role: "it enlightened me to the housing issues in our community and helped me see first-hand how essential

affordable, safe, and sanitary housing is to the health and well-being of each individual and the community as a whole."

Nelson has lived in Austin for fourteen years, and was a tenant until 2016. During this time, she has witnessed the city's population growth as well as the dramatic increase in housing costs. Nelson says that bearing witness to these changes motivated her to join ATC's mission:

"We now have a housing shortage in Austin and certainly a shortage of affordable housing. This creates a climate that also has the potential to promote housing discrimination. The work of the Tenants Council is as relevant now as it has ever been and I am excited to join the team."



Check Out ATC's New Website!

This past September, ATC launched its new website. A group of volunteer graduate students contributed their web design skills and competed in OpenAIR, a contest by Knowbility.org, to make this possible. Special thanks to Jayne Cravens at Knowbility, and team Julia: Julia Wu, Susan Doong, Nealon Suthersan, Lauren Vanvlierbergen, and Joshua Walker.

Following their contributions, Housing Advocate Kat Grau spearheaded the transition from the old page to the new one. Kat said that her main goals for the website were to "mirror the information on the old site, present a more intuitive format, and allow for quicker updates so that tenants can access relevant information."

Several of the new site's organizational features aim to streamline clients' searches for information. Housing resources

have been divided into landlord concerns and tenant concerns. Additionally, at the bottom of each fact sheet, tenants will find a link to counseling services so that they can plan their next steps. The website also includes more details about the history of the Austin Tenants Council. "We have been around since 1973," Kat stated, "so it's important that we showcase our history on the website." Guillermo Garza, ATC's Office Manager, and David Jones, an ATC board member, contributed pictures that appear throughout the site. "We are now using only agency photos, no stock photos," Kat said.

According to Kat, ATC is already seeing the impact of the new website's design: "the numbers for our Online Counseling Program have dramatically increased because the website has made it more intuitive to access that service." ATC's Online Counseling Program allows tenants to submit questions through an online portal. Kat says that this program expands

ATC's accessibility: "our telephone and in-house counseling services are provided during business hours. Online counseling is an important resource for tenants who may not be able to reach us during the workday." This service is available in English and Spanish to residents of Travis and Hays Counties.

As for what's next, the website is a work in progress. Scott Rose, ATC's Landlord-Tenant Manager, has a few ideas in mind: "we are going to add more fact sheets addressing frequent tenant concerns. We are also hoping to make our website fully bilingual."

Cold Weather Shelters

If you or someone you know is experiencing homelessness on cold nights, call the Cold Weather Shelter hotline at 512-305-ICEE (4233) to learn about shelter availability.

Ampliar oportunidades en Texas Central

El 8 de noviembre de 2018, Community Advancement Network o CAN (Red de Progreso Comunitario) presentó la cumbre regional de Texas Central llamada Superar Diferencias Económicas – Ampliar Oportunidades, en el Centro de Conferencias de San Marcos. Ante el siempre cambiante panorama del área central de Texas, CAN reunió a dirigentes de los cinco condados del Área Metropolitana Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos para examinar dos cuestiones importantes: 1- ¿Qué papel tiene la ampliación de oportunidades de vivienda en la superación de diferencias económicas?, y 2- ¿Qué se puede hacer para mejorar el acceso a la

vivienda para individuos y familias trabajadoras? Las respuestas a estas preguntas darán forma al futuro de nuestra región.

Durante la cumbre, CAN también celebró el 50° aniversario del Acta Federal de Vivienda Justa, reconociendo a las siguientes agencias y colaboradores: Austin Tenants Council (ATC), ARCIL (A Resource Center for Independent Living), Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable, Texas Appleseed, Texas Housers, y Bastrop CommunityCares. CAN también reconoció a las siguientes personas por hacer prioritaria la vivienda justa en sus municipalidades: Stacy Brown – Ciudad de San Marcos, Eliza-

beth Alvarado – Ciudad de Round Rock, Susan Watkins – Ciudad de Georgetown, y Gail McCant – Ciudad de Austin.

ATC (el Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin) desea agradecer a CAN por reconocer la labor que hacemos a diario tratando de ayudar a los tejanos del Centro a ocupar una vivienda segura, decente y justa. También queremos felicitar a las agencias e individuos que fueron reconocidos por todo su trabajo para asegurar que la vivienda justa siga siendo una prioridad en Texas Central.

El Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin da la bienvenida a su nueva directora ejecutiva

El 1° de diciembre, el Consejo de Inquilinos de Austin (ATC) anunció que su junta directiva eligió a Jeanie Nelson como nueva directora ejecutiva de la organización. Nelson se integra a ATC después de casi tres años como directora de Servicios Dentales en Servicios Austin de AIDS (ASA). Antes de ASA, Nelson trabajó como higienista dental mayor en Austin Dental Arts. Ella también aporta varios años de experiencia en la administración de recursos humanos.

“Después de un intenso proceso de búsqueda, la directiva se complace en anunciar que hemos hallado en Jeanie Nelson la mejor candidata para asumir el liderazgo de esta importante organización en Austin”, dijo Kate Moore, presidenta de la junta directiva. “Jeanie tiene 20 años de experiencia y conocimientos administrativos para mantener a la organización

saludable y en crecimiento. Esto, junto a su dedicación por la igualdad y justicia social, hacen a Jeanie especialmente capaz para dirigir Austin Tenants Council”, añadió Moore.

Aunque la experiencia de Nelson incluye labores en diversos campos, ella cree que “el hilo conductor ha sido el deseo de ayudar a la gente y capacidad para desarrollar temas y sistemas que logren resultados apoyados en información e impulsados por una meta”. En particular, su trabajo en AIDS Services of Austin la preparó para esta labor: “me hizo consciente de los problemas de vivienda en nuestra comunidad, y me ayudó a ver personalmente lo esencial que es tener una vivienda económica, segura y sanitaria para la salud y bienestar de toda persona y de la comunidad en general”.

Nelson vive en Austin desde hace catorce años y fue inquilina hasta el 2016. Durante este período, ella ha sido testigo del crecimiento demográfico de la ciudad, así como del dramático incremento en el costo de la vivienda. Nelson dice que presenciar estos cambios la motivaron a unirse a la misión de ATC:

“Hoy tenemos escasez de viviendas en Austin y definitivamente gran escasez de viviendas económicas. Esta escasez crea un clima con potencial para promover la discriminación en la vivienda. El trabajo de Tenants Council es tan importante hoy como lo ha sido siempre, y estoy entusiasmada de unirme al equipo”.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

If your agency would like to receive additional copies of this newsletter or if you have any changes to the mailing list, contact Daniel at 512-474-7006 Ext. 102 or Daniel@housing-rights.org. If you prefer to view our newsletter online, we will gladly remove your name from our mailing list.

This service is certified as a lawyer referral service as required by the State of Texas under Chapter 952, Occupations Code.

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The Austin Tenants Council, as a subrecipient of the City of Austin, is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request. Please call 512-474-1961 (voice) or Relay Texas at 1-800-735-2989 (TDD) for assistance. The City does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in its programs and activities. David Ondich has been designated as the City's Section 504/ADA Coordinator. Her office is located at 505 Barton Springs Road, Suite 600. If you have any questions or complaints regarding your Section 504/ADA rights, please call the Section 504/ADA Coordinator at 974-3256 (voice) or 974-2445 (TTY). This publication is available in alternative formats. Please call 512-474-1961 (voice) or Relay Texas at 1-800-735-2989 (TDD) for assistance.

Fair Housing Program / Programa de Vivienda Justa This program helps any person in the Austin metropolitan area who has been discriminated against in the rental, sale, financing, or appraisal of housing. FHP investigates complaints and coordinates legal services to assist victims of discrimination when their rights under state and federal fair housing laws have been violated. Este programa ayuda a cualquier persona en el area metropolitana de Austin que se ha enfrentado con discriminación en la renta, compra, financiamiento, o evaluación de vivienda. El FHP investiga las quejas y coordina servicios legales para las victimas de discriminación cuando sus derechos están violados bajo las leyes estatales y federales de vivienda justa. Call / llame al 474-7006.

Telephone Counseling / Consejos por Telefono Trained counselors answer tenant-landlord questions and make appropriate referrals. However, ATC offers no legal advice. Consejeros contestan preguntas acerca de inquilinos-propietarios y hacen referencias necesarias. Sin embargo, ATC no ofrece consejos legales. Call / llame al 474-1961.

In-House Counseling / Consejos en la Oficina Counseling information and materials are provided to clients in need of more in-depth assistance. Se provee información y materiales a los clientes que necesitan mayor información. Call for an appointment / llame para una cita al 474-7006.

Crisis Intervention / Intervencion Crisis Counselors mediate on behalf of tenants to resolve emergencies that threaten their housing. Consejeros median en nombre del inquilino a resolver una emergencia que amenaza su vivienda. Call / llame al 474-1961.

Rental Repair Assistance / Ayuda con Reparaciones en su Vivenda The Renters' Rights Assistance Program helps low-income renters enforce their rights for repairs through advocacy and mediation. El Programa de Asistencia con los Derechos de Inquilinos ayuda a los inquilinos de bajo ingreso da fuerza a sus derechos para reparaciones por medio de negociación y mediación. Call / llame al 474-7006.

Lease Forms / Contratos ATC sells lease packets and brochures describing landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities to landlords for a small fee. ATC vende paquetes de contratos y folletos, por una cuota nominal, describiendo los derechos y las responsabilidades del propietario y del inquilino. Call for more information / llame para mayor información al 474-7006 .

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