

# Housing Plan Tackles Discrimination

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ons' in office who have chosen approaches that strongly align with what her organizations supports.

"The biggest problem is that we don't know how bad the problem is," she said. "So it is difficult to come up with sound housing policies to address the problem."

Aguilera said Fish's action plan emphasizes a comprehensive approach that strongly aligns with what the Community Alliance of Tenants supports.

According to Maileen Hampto, the public information officer for the Portland Housing Bureau, "The action plan is to see what local government and community groups can do together to take down barriers and allow fair access for everyone to qualify for housing."

Daniel Ledezma, the policy maker for Commissioner Fish, said, "One opportunity the action presents is that we are able to leverage our federal funding with other efforts by community organizations and the housing industry."

She said, in the past, fair housing hasn't been an issue that local elected officials have focused on, and Commissioner Fish has tried to set a wide table so everyone can participate. "In the end, we are more effective when

people can come together with their resources," she said.

And Aguilera agrees. "If we can come together and prioritize and fund and implement some of these recommendations, we can actually reduce some of the barriers to fair housing."

There are four elements of the action plan, including enforcement, education, the collection of data and information, and housing policy changes.

"With race and nationality, it was a matter of getting into housing locations, getting repairs and just flat out complaints of not so subtle discrimination," she said.

One recommendation in the action plan addresses the locations of where affordable housing is located within the city.

"I think there are historical links to people of color and disabilities not being able to access housing in more desirable neighborhoods because of development, funding and prioritization going towards other issues," Aguilera said. "In the past, this has not been a priority, and these are things CAT has been calling for years."

According to Cristina Palacio, a volunteer with the Community Alliance of Tenants, the action plan is a good starting point for change.

Palacio explained her own experi-

ence with discrimination was the reason she became involved in the organization and is why she likes to help tenants in apartment complexes demand safe and affordable housing.

Each year the alliance answers questions and offers advice from over 2,500 calls from Portland residents. Palacio said a fair number of these calls include some kind of discrimination or mistreatment.

Often, she said, landlords target certain communities because they believe they can take advantage of them. "People don't know they are being discriminated against," she said. "So I am working with volunteers to translate the report so people who are affected can know what the report says."

"One of the challenges our volunteers face is some of the callers don't realize they might be experiencing discrimination," Palacio said. "It's harder for people to tell there is this unfairness going on. Fair housing violations are severely under reported."

Aguilera said the complaint-based system creates one of the biggest challenges in trying to fight housing discrimination because tenants more often than not carry a high level of fear of retaliation that makes enforcement difficult.

Although many believe the vague

reports of what was actually found from the audit testing continues to create political noise throughout the community, stakeholders throughout the community believe the action plan is a way to address the results

known through proactive efforts. "Housing Discrimination is not just a city problem," Aguilera said. "This is something that affects all of Multnomah County—quite frankly, the whole state."

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# Soccer, a Universal Language for Youth

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and active engagement in their community, Dar and AYOOC volunteers connect immigrant refugee families and youth to resources specific to their needs.

After years in refugee camps, many youth arrive illiterate and lacking skills inherent to industrialized societies. Unable to keep up academically, many kids drop out or face expulsion from their schools. One way AYOOC addresses such obstacles is bringing those kids together through mentorship and sports.

"The language of soccer is universal," said Dar, who is motivated by the need to build a stronger community not only within the Somali immigrant population, but the community of Portland.

Ibrahim Kassin, 15, is another Somali refugee who was born and raised in a Kenyan camp after his mother escaped her war-torn homeland.

He holds a soccer ball made of plastic bags wrapped in twine that youth like him kicked around back in the refugee camps of Africa. At the camp, Kassin says he spent most days playing soccer in sand fields nearby and with barely enough food to eat everyday, he only went to school once a month.

"In Kenya, I never thought I'd do anything when I got older," said Kassin who plays mid-defender for his team. "Here, it gives me the opportunity to do something." Kassin is on track to graduate from Wilson High School and plans to be an engineer in the future.

Four days a week, practices are lead by coaches Nuur Hassan and Mahadi Mahadi nicknamed "Baggio" whose footwork attribute to Italian soccer legend Roberto Baggio.

Both men are originally from Somalia. Nuur Hassan, a youth leader of AYOOC, moved to the U.S. with his family from a Kenyan refugee camp called Banadir, where he too learned to play soccer.

"Lots of kids want to play soccer, but nobody can support them," said Hassan who has lived in Portland for 15 years. Without pay, Hassan and Mahadi encourage kids to come to practice where with a little hard work; they will help them become better players.

"At the end of the day, parents appreciate our work here," said Hassan. Keeping them at practice also curbs temptation toward trouble on the streets. "They get tired and go home," says Mahadi.

Mahadi, immigrated with his family to Dallas, Texas, expecting to pursue his lifelong goal of playing competitive soccer. However al-

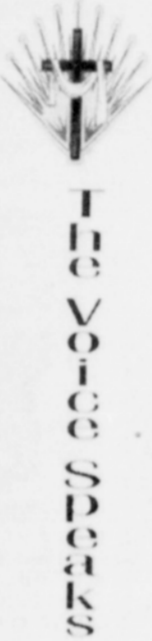
ready in his 20s and lacking a formal education, Mahadi says he "didn't get where he wanted" since most professional soccer players emerge through the college system. Yet, he has still managed to travel and play soccer all over the country, broadening his experiences in a culturally diverse America.

As his first-time coaching kids, Mahadi is already known and trusted by his players. In preparing them for not only the upcoming tournament, but "how to live life in America," Mahadi would like to his players achieve what he arrived too late in the game for; a future in soccer and education.

AYOOC acts not only as a link to African immigrant but bridges the cultural divide between immigrant communities and the larger community of Portland.

"Everybody wants to support these kids," said Alejandro "Alex" Vidales, recreation coordinator for Parks and Recreation's Outreach Services, who would like to expand diversity in Portland's sports recreation programs.


Vidales sees the partnership as an opportunity for Portland to welcome new cultures by sharing our traditions with existing traditions of the Somali community, and what better way to bring the two together than a soccer match.



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