



OPEN COMMUNITIES
ALLIANCE

PROGRESS REPORT YEAR 1

Meeting the Need for a New Policy Voice

Establishing Open Communities Alliance

In October of 2013 a small group of civil rights and poverty prevention advocates launched Open Communities Alliance (OCA). Recognizing the deep impact that isolation from “opportunity” - like thriving schools and safe neighborhoods - has on families, and that this impact is most acutely felt by Black and Latino families, Open Communities’ founders saw the need for a new policy voice in Connecticut.

What is Opportunity?

“Opportunity” is access to the resources needed to be successful in life. These include the ability to attend a successful school, live in a safe community, and connect to social networks that lead to jobs.

MISSION

Open Communities Alliance is a civil rights opportunity for all people through education,



VISION

OCA's work is premised on the understanding that in the state of Connecticut "opportunity" is abundant, but Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately isolated from opportunity structures due to segregated housing patterns. This has had a devastating impact on Blacks and Latinos in an array of areas including health, education, employment, and incarceration outcomes. Housing segregation is caused by a range of factors including discrimination, government policies, and lack of information on a diversity of housing options. While housing segregation is at the heart of many disparities, OCA also addresses other factors that contribute to opportunity isolation such as insufficient access to transportation and high quality schools.

We envision a time when opportunity in Connecticut is not based on where you live and every town is home to its fair share of affordable housing.

organization that promotes access to advocacy, research, and partnerships.

How we fulfill our mission

OCA builds and works with an urban/suburban interracial grassroots coalition, non-profit partners, and other stakeholders to advocate for policies that promote integration and access to opportunity. As part of this work, OCA conducts policy research on the causes and impact of segregation and develops strategies that create access to opportunity and housing choice. We link people in historically disenfranchised groups to information on higher opportunity housing. OCA works in thriving or “higher opportunity” areas as well as under-resourced or “lower opportunity” areas.



Erin Boggs, Esq., founder and Executive Director

of Open Communities Alliance, launched OCA to respond to an urgent need for a new perspective on policy issues connecting to place, race, ethnicity and income.

Prior to launching the Alliance, Ms. Boggs was Staff Attorney and Interim Legal Director of the CT ACLU, where she litigated fair housing cases. Subsequently, she served as Deputy Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. At the Center, Ms. Boggs dedicated a major portion of her time to developing materials and messaging about the impact of segregation on access to opportunity for people of color in Connecticut.

Ms. Boggs is a graduate of Wesleyan University and Georgetown University School of Law. She is a native of Washington, DC and attended DC public schools.



Board & Advisors



J.L. Pottenger (Board Chair) is the Nathan Baker Clinical Professor of Law and Supervising Attorney at Yale Law School. His subjects include housing and community development, legislative advocacy, prison legal services, trial practice, landlord/tenant law, and professional responsibility. Professor Pottenger received his A.B. from Princeton and his J.D. from Yale.



Julie Alleyne (Board Member) is the CEO of Deposit Group, of which she is a co-founder. The company is providing alternatives to the cash security deposit for renters. Prior to Deposit Group, Ms. Alleyne served as a Director in the Bond Claim Department of The Hartford, where she managed a team of attorneys and claim professionals. She received her B.A. from Drew University in 1992 and her J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law in 1995.



Robert Hinton (Board Member) has extensive experience in all phases of commercial and complex litigation and employment law counseling and is a member of Pullman and Comley's Labor, Employment Law & Employee Benefits Department. Prior to beginning his legal career, Mr. Hinton served more than eight years on active duty in the United States Army.



Dr. Anthony De Jesús (Board Member) is an Assistant Professor of Social Work and Latino Community Practice and Director of Field Education for the MSW Program at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT. Dr. De Jesús holds Ed.D. and Ed.M. degrees from Harvard University, an MSW from Boston University and a BSW from Dominican College. He has conducted research and published on the Latino educational pipeline, access to career pathways in health, and mental health professions for Latinos and the influence of residential segregation on Puerto Rican marriage patterns.



John Relman (Board Member) is the founder and director of Relman, Dane & Colfax PLLC. Mr. Relman has represented scores of plaintiffs and public interest organizations in individual and class action discrimination cases in federal court. He is a graduate of Harvard University and University of Michigan Law School.



Philip Tegeler (Board Member) is the Executive Director of the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, a civil rights policy organization convened by major civil rights, civil liberties, and anti-poverty groups. Mr. Tegeler is a civil rights lawyer with more than 25 years experience in fair housing, educational equity, land use law, and institutional reform litigation. Mr. Tegeler is a graduate of Harvard College and the Columbia Law School.



Shelley Geballe (Advisory Board) is a Visiting Clinical Lecturer at Yale Law School and Lecturer at the Yale School of Public Health (Department of Epidemiology and Public Health), she served as President of Connecticut Voices for Children from its start in 1995 until October 2008. At Yale Law School Ms. Geballe co-teaches the Legislative Advocacy class. At Yale Medical School she teaches a course in Health Disparities. Ms. Geballe received her law degree from Yale Law School (1976) and her public health degree from Yale Medical School (1995).

Promoting Access to Opportunity

We are all situated within a web of opportunity with access to greater or fewer resources depending on where we live. These resources are critical to ensuring that people – and children in particular – are safe, well educated, healthy, and have the necessary building blocks to create successful lives.

The deep levels of segregation in Connecticut means that Blacks and Latinos are opportunity isolated.

This opportunity map, in which the darker the shading the greater the access to opportunity resources like thriving schools and safe neighborhoods, shows the severe opportunity disparities in the Hartford region.



Living in Lower Opportunity Areas

Blacks:	81%
Latinos:	79%
Whites:	25%
Asians:	44%

Source: People, Place & Opportunity: Mapping Communities of Opportunity in Connecticut, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2010.

Infrastructure Accomplishments

Within its first year OCA has:

- Launched the new organization with a fiscal sponsor, the Connecticut Urban Legal Initiative at the University of Connecticut School of Law.
- Incorporated with the state of Connecticut.
- Applied for non-profit status.
- Grown its board to six members with strong commitments to expanding opportunity.
- Developed a mission statement, initial strategic plan, and policy priorities.



How is OCA different from other CT non-profits?

OCA is prepared to engage in a frank discussion about race and place in Connecticut. Our work complements the efforts of housing organizations focused on other important issues such as affordable housing production, homelessness prevention, and addressing individual instances of housing discrimination.

We also go beyond housing to connect the dots between geography, race, and life outcomes.

Strategic Plan

OCA's framework for addressing the lack of access to opportunity begins with identifying needs in particular communities. The next steps are to identify root causes, explore solutions and best practices, educate stakeholders and, finally, advocate for change. Central initiatives include "fair share" housing efforts to encourage all towns in Connecticut to take on an appropriate portion of affordable housing, bringing balance to the placement of subsidized housing, ensuring full access to housing through mobility counseling and education on fair housing rights and advocating for better collection and analysis of housing data.

Identify Need

Lack of affordable housing options in thriving neighborhoods and other barriers to opportunity

Research Root Causes

Zoning changes / fair share housing
Better placement of housing subsidies
Mobility counseling

Explore Solutions and Best Practices

NJ Fair Share Law
PE & NJ subsidized housing placement
Mobility counseling in TX

Educate Stakeholders

General public
Coalition members
Non-profit partners
Decisionmakers

Advocate for Change

Media, Meetings, Reports



Policy Priorities

Long-Term Policy Goals: OCA strives to effect change in three key areas that connect to cross-cutting objectives.

Fair Share Housing

Change state and municipal structures that prevent affordable housing from being created outside of lower opportunity areas, including through innovative approaches to zoning and fair share allocations.

Balanced Housing Subsidy Placement

Bring balance to the placement of subsidized housing to ensure that state and federal housing subsidy programs are operated in a manner that creates housing choices in higher opportunity areas.

Access to Opportunity Housing

Expand access to affordable housing outside of lower opportunity areas including through support of mobility counseling and fair housing education and enforcement.

Data & Research

Improve the depth, availability, and analysis of data related to fair housing, affirmatively furthering fair housing and opportunity access.

State Planning

Make affirmatively furthering fair housing central to state planning and actions.

Fair Housing Enforcement

Contribute to fair housing enforcement and education.

Housing Mobility

Support services that provide counseling to government housing recipients and train counselors on housing options in areas that are thriving.

Support efforts to bring resources to areas that are under-resourced.

Educating

Open Communities Alliance has carried its message of opportunity access to 15 different venues providing critical policy perspective to more than 500 people in Connecticut.



Open Communities Alliance Executive Director Erin Boggs and Wethersfield resident Bildade Augustin were panelists at a session on the housing-education connection highlighting mobility counseling at the annual conference of the Connecticut Housing Coalition.



Open Communities Alliance moderated a panel discussion responding to Princeton professor and desegregation expert Douglas Massey's new book, *Building Mt. Laurel*, which found exceptional positive outcomes for low-income families moving to thriving neighborhoods – and no negative outcomes for their new communities.



Jason Reece of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, OCA's Erin Boggs, and Demetria McCain of the Inclusive Community Project in Texas participated in a session on opportunity advocacy at the National Legal Aid and Defender Association's Litigation Director's national conference in Austin, TX.

Other presentations include:

- Presenting alongside the Ford Foundation at the annual gathering of the Regional Planning Association of NY, CT, and NJ.
- Serving as a panel member at the annual meeting of the Connecticut Public Health Association.
- Briefing the Commission on Children's Two Gen Taskforce.
- Providing opportunity updates to the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs and African-American Affairs Commissions.

Partnering

Yale Law School In 2014 Open Communities Alliance worked with Yale Law School's Legislative Advocacy and Community Development clinics to research a range of policies that promote access to opportunity.

MAGIC, Trinity & Blueprint for Change Open Communities Alliance worked with the Mapping and Geographical Information Center at the University of Connecticut, Trinity College, and Blueprint for Impact to generate maps highlighting the disparity of access to opportunity by race.

Partnership for Strong Communities OCA is a partner in the Partnership for Strong Communities' "First and Last Mile" conversations exploring how to better connect public transportation resources in Connecticut.

Mobility Collaborative Open Communities Alliance partners with HOME Inc., the Housing Education Resource Center and New Opportunities to explore ways to improve and expand critical mobility counseling services ensuring that people using government housing subsidies like RAP and the Housing Choice Voucher Program have the opportunity to live in all areas of Connecticut.

National Housing Trust Open Communities Alliance works with the National Housing Trust, a highly respected national non-profit focused on preserving affordable housing, to develop innovative financing approaches to generate affordable housing in thriving neighborhoods.

Kirwan Institute OCA has worked with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity to update opportunity mapping for Connecticut.

Helping Hands!

The Alliance is deeply grateful for the assistance of our excellent volunteers. We could not have accomplished all we have during our first year without you!

Scott Gaul, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Professor Jack Dougherty, Trinity College
Chris Brechlin, Blueprint for Impact
Diana Deng, Partnership for Strong Communities

Claire Morduch
Michael Howser, UConn MAGIC
Steve Batt, University of Connecticut
The legal and administrative staff of Shipman and Goodwin, LLP

And a special thanks to Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance for donated office space!

Generating Data

Hackathon! Creating the Mobility App

In April, Open Communities Alliance's team won a Hackathon sponsored by the CT Mirror and reSET Social Enterprise Trust.

Our "Mobility App" is a tool that allows people using Housing Choice Vouchers and the counselors assisting them to locate housing in higher opportunity areas with thriving schools and safe streets. Users can enter an address to immediately see how the area they are considering rates on a five level scale and learn the proximity of grocery stores, places of worship, schools and childcare facilities.



The Hackathon Team:

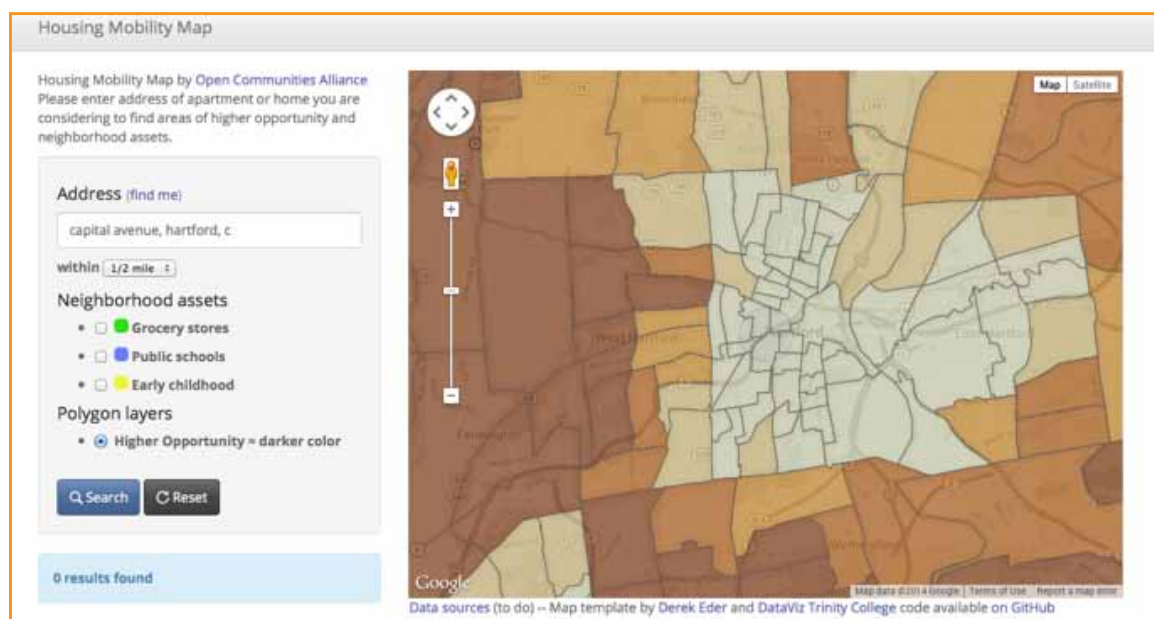
Chris Brechlin of Blueprint for Impact

Prof. Jack Dougherty of Trinity College

Diana Deng of the Partnership for Strong Communities

Scott Gaul of the Hartford Foundation

Evan Dobos and Elliot Berg of PictureThis WEBCENTER



Fostering Positive Change

OCA has contributed to positive policy developments on opportunity access:

- The Department of Housing initiated a funding round that includes affirmatively furthering fair housing projects (those project that promote housing choice) as one of three priorities.
- The first ever meeting of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority about fair housing and affirmatively furthering fair housing took place in June.
- Department of Housing made changes to one of its funding streams to prioritize family housing.
- The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority created a first ever set aside for a higher opportunity development (one out of 4 or 5 developments typically awarded funding) in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. There is much more to do, but this is a start.

In the News

Editorial: Open Communities Alliance – A New Advocate for Integration

The Connecticut Law Tribune

MAY 29, 2014

Connecticut is racially, ethnically, and economically segregated. This segregation hurts us all because it keeps people of color, who on average earn about half of whites, from equal access to critical resources like good schools. We also know that the effect of unequal access to those resources that lead to success in life is generational – if parents do not have access to opportunity, it increases the likelihood that their children will be “stuck in place,” as recent research by sociologist Patrick Sharkey

“Fortunately for Connecticut, a new civil rights non-profit, Open Communities Alliance, has just been launched to focus attention on how these kinds of innovative and successful strategies foster access to opportunity for people of color and housing integration.”

— *CT Law Tribune*

“Online tool to help find better Section 8 housing wins contest.”

— *WHSU News Service*

“For Connecticut’s future prosperity, we must continue making strategic investments in our cities, but we must also actively take steps to ensure that all Connecticut towns can be home to Connecticut’s population of the future.”

— *OCA Op-ed CT Mirror*

Friendraising & Fundraising

OCA is grateful for the financial support of national and Connecticut foundations and individual donors. With their assistance we were able to raise \$130,000 in our first year.



FORDFOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation has supported OCA's work by supporting a project that allows OCA to reach out to other groups across the country engaging in efforts to create access to opportunity through fair housing advocacy.



**Connecticut Health
FOUNDATION**
Changing Systems, Improving Lives.

The Connecticut Health Foundation recognizes the connection between place, race and the social determinants of health. The Foundation has provided critical initial funding for OCA.



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**

Open Society Foundation has provided seed money to OCA to develop an outreach and messaging strategy to educate the public, policymakers, and fellow non-profits on strategies that create housing choice and access to opportunity.

Sassafras Foundation

OCA is deeply grateful to the Sassafras Foundation for providing the initial challenge grant that allowed an idea to become a movement!



The law firm of Shipman & Goodwin has provided critical financial and administrative support to Open Communities Alliance.

Future Fundraising Priorities

In coming years OCA hopes to increase its capacity to focus on:

- The early childhood/opportunity connection.
- Opportunity isolation and the social determinants of health.
- Sustainable communities and transportation.
- The education/opportunity access nexus.
- Outreach and education focused on specific geographical areas of Connecticut.



ARE YOU IN?

**Help ensure that success in life is not dictated by a zip code!
Support Open Communities Alliance.**

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to:

Open Communities Alliance, 207 Washington Street, Hartford, CT 06106

For more about OCA, visit our website at www.ctoca.org



OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

Embracing Diversity to Strengthen Connecticut

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