

# Diversity at Horizon House, A Work in Progress

July 2016

Since our founding 55 years ago, Horizon House has made “service to the broader community” part of its mission. That’s a sweeping goal, encompassing outreach of many kinds, but contained within it is a belief that increasing diversity is a key component of being a good neighbor within that broader community and an effort that can only enhance lives within our own walls. Commitment toward this goal remains strong, even as its achievement is a work in progress.

### **Resident Diversity**

Out of a population of approximately 520 residents, where ages range from 67 to 104, the overwhelming majority at Horizon House is white, with just under 4% Asian American, African American, and people of other or mixed races. Approximately 50% of residents claim no religious affiliation; the other half is predominantly Protestant, although our population also includes Jews, Catholics, and Buddhists. Horizon House also demonstrates quite a range in terms of socio-economic status: entrance fees start at just over \$40,000 and rise to more than \$1 million. From our beginnings, philanthropic assistance has been available to residents who have outlived their assets. Today, fully 25% of our residents are considered moderate income (defined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development as the median income in King County). Clearly, however, there is ample opportunity to increase resident diversity.

### **Staff Diversity**

Horizon House staff, on the other hand, is quite racially and ethnically diverse: 37% Asian American, 28% Black or African American, 25% white, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Pacific Islander, and 2% multi-racial, representing origins in 27 countries, as well as the United States. We actively recruit to increase diversity, particularly in managerial and higher positions where people of color are less well-represented.

### **Diversity in Seattle & King County**

Examining a larger context, the majority of our residents as well as staff come from Seattle or greater King County. Per the latest [2010] census, “the racial makeup of King County was 68.7% white, 14.6% Asian, 6.2% Black or African American, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 0.8% American Indian, 3.9% from other races, and 5.0% from two or more races. Those of Hispanic or Latino origin made up 8.9% of the population.” In a 2011 article published in *Crosscut* by Dick Morrill, an emeritus professor of geography at the University of Washington and an expert in urban demography, we find further refinement of the data: “The main story from the (2010) census findings is the continued gentrification of Seattle, with displacement of minorities and the less affluent out of the center of the city, especially to south King County and Pierce County. The city core is becoming whiter, while the edges and suburbs, north and east as well as south, are becoming far more diverse.” A June 28, 2016 article in the *Seattle Times* noted that King County’s population is now 17% Asian, but, as in 2010, Seattle continues to hold its place as the fifth whitest big city in the nation.

### **Diversity Initiatives: *Ethnic Awareness Committee***

Like so many Horizon House programs, our diversity initiative initially sprang from residents themselves. The Residents' Council sponsors more than 70 committees and interest groups, one of which is the Ethnic Awareness Committee, founded in 2002 by African American resident Ruth Lynch and active to the present day. Their Statement of Purpose is instructive, "From the foundation of our nation to the present, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities have made major contributions to the building of our democracy with its promise of freedom and equality for all. The Ethnic Awareness Committee has been formed to help the residents of Horizon House understand and celebrate these contributions and how they were accomplished in spite of obstacles. In particular, the committee seeks to help our residents appreciate that some of these barriers still persist, not only for the same minorities, but for newly emerging ethnic and racial groups who seek freedom and equality. The committee has been organized to present programs designed to further these goals, with its focus on a wide variety of ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious heritages." Currently the committee presents a featured speaker or group each month, an event which is free and open to the public. In June, Cassandra Mires, Outreach Director for the United Negro College Fund, spoke on making the case for historically black colleges and universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This month the Ethnic Awareness Committee event featured a video showing the creation of the Duwamish Tribe "story pole" and a discussion of the tribe's embattled history, from early contact with European Americans to the present. In August, the committee will present Michael Itti, the Executive Director of the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs.

### ***Spotlight on Seattle***

Another resident effort to increase awareness of the diverse city in which we live is "Spotlight on Seattle (SOS)," organized in 2012 by former City Councilwoman and longtime Horizon House resident Phyllis Lamphere. From the International District/Chinatown to West Seattle, the SOS group has provided tours of neighborhoods, distinguished community speakers, ethnic dining, and presentations of art and culture. The first quarter of 2016 saw a rolling series of events focusing on Southeast Seattle, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city: a bus tour of the area, extending from North Rainier Avenue to Seward Park and back via Martin Luther King, Jr. Way; a presentation on the neighborhood's history and economic development; speakers from Franklin, Cleveland, and Rainier Beach High Schools, as well as student musical performances; meetings with community organizers, refugee alliances, merchants' associations, and housing organizations.

### ***Community Relations Committee***

The Board of Trustees chartered its own Community Relations Committee in 2008 to address the role of Horizon House in our broader community, specifically how we could best support seniors in need – whether through grants, partnerships with organizations sharing our values, or volunteer help. Over the years, the Community Relations Committee was instrumental in the founding of the Northwest Center for Creative Aging and Wider Horizons Senior Village, supporting the First Hill Improvement Association and Freeway Park Foundation to increase safety and cultural opportunities in the neighborhood, and creating a Community Grants program that funded such organizations as Plymouth Housing and Mary’s Place, both of which provide extensive services to needy seniors—as well as afford many volunteer opportunities to Horizon House residents. By 2014, the Community Relations Committee concluded that a diversity initiative was such an important component of community outreach that a separate committee should be formed.

### ***Diversity Sub-Committee***

A Diversity Sub-Committee, composed of Board, staff, and residents, was chartered to “establish a multi-year strategy to enhance the resident diversity at Horizon House.” Their responsibilities included education as to the value of and barriers to diversity, as well as the creation of an outreach program to attract a diverse resident population to Horizon House in terms of ethnicity, race, cultural background, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. From 2014 to the present, members of the Diversity Sub-Committee have conducted outreach on a personal level to their friends and associates of color; hosted larger events for community groups, like the recent luncheon and tour of Horizon House for Nichibei, a Japanese-American women’s group; and enhanced Horizon House advertising in a variety of publications aimed at diverse audiences, from African American and Asian American newspapers, to publications aimed at various religious groups, to the Pride Guide, which is dedicated to the LGBT community.

The latest initiative of the Diversity Committee was a meeting of religious, educational, government, and civic leaders from the African American community convened to introduce Horizon House and to seek input on how best to create awareness of our offerings. Suggestions ranged from increasing advertising and outreach to Black community groups, to making Horizon House spaces available to those groups, to supporting local organizations like Wider Horizons Village that represent a wide cross-section of retirees. Ultimately, participants urged us to “meet people where they are” – the choice of retirement community is just that — a choice, conditioned by culture or individual preference as much as anything. It will be important for Horizon House to continue to reach out to communities of color and to present ourselves as a viable option for senior living.

### **Resident Experience**

The experience of recent arrival Dr. Bill Womack bears out these findings. Bill had lived and worked in the heart of Seattle and when his mobility issues indicated he needed to

move to a retirement community, that is where he looked. His choices (he looked at three facilities in addition to Horizon House) were conditioned more by location, his own timing, the size of apartment, good food service, and a pool than by resident diversity. That being said, even though Bill was one of a handful of African American residents at Horizon House, he felt comfortable from the start. It has been easy for him to meet people, make friends, and feel supported—but in a pleasantly low key, unobtrusive way.

### **Horizon House is a Welcoming Community**

The message inherent in all these efforts is that Horizon House is a welcoming community with an enduring commitment to increasing diversity across the spectrum of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. We're striving to convey that message and fulfill that commitment in more and better ways.