



# Healthy Home, Healthy Child: The Westside Children's Asthma Partnership

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## Healthy Home, Healthy Child Update

Recently, the Healthy Home, Healthy Child (HHHC) program was honored with two prestigious awards. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognized HHHC with the *2010 National Environmental Leadership Award in Asthma Management* for its exemplary and innovative approach for delivering high-quality asthma care that includes environmental controls. Award winners were recognized for demonstrating that comprehensive asthma care with a strong environmental component can dramatically improve health outcomes and quality of life for people with asthma. HHHC was one of five programs to receive this award which was presented by the EPA at the *Communities in Action National Asthma Forum* in Washington, DC, on June 17, 2010.



EPA Award (Left to Right): EPA Representative, Helen Margellos-Anast, Melissa Gutierrez, NFL Linebacker Chris Draft, and Gloria Seals



NOVA Award: President and CEO of the Sinai Health System, Alan Channing, and the Pediatric Asthma Team

On July 24, 2010, the American Hospital Association (AHA) presented the Sinai Urban Health Institute and HHHC program with a *NOVA Award* for its hospital-led community effort to educate the families and reduce the severity of pediatric asthma on the west side of Chicago. Established in 1993, the coveted and much acclaimed AHA *NOVA Award* recognizes hospitals and health systems for their collaborative efforts towards improving community health.

We ultimately want to thank the many families and our partners, whose invaluable support and participation helped us to make this program so effective. Together, they have provided priceless feedback and support that informs and shapes our interventions, helping us to better serve the community.

### ABOUT HEALTHY HOME, HEALTHY CHILD:

Awarded in September 2008, HHHC is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The program's goal is to reduce asthma-related morbidity and mortality and improve quality of life, via meaningful collaboration with the community.

## A Report from the Field: Surviving Landlord Retaliation

By Loreen Targos, Metropolitan Tenants Organization

As the seasons change and children head back to school, sniffles and coughs are shared among school children nearly as quickly as the leaves change color and fall away with the coming of winter. It was this kind of weather that used to send Trinity, now aged 7, to the emergency room 4 or 5 times a month. Marlene, her mother, told me that one particularly bad attack had recently landed her daughter back into the emergency room. This time, a staff member mentioned that she would be referring Trinity to an asthma program. Marlene agreed. If they could help Trinity, she decided it was worth it to participate in the program.

When her community health educator, Pat Perkins, came for the first home visit, Marlene listened. "I didn't like that Trinity had to take medication." Pat began to explain proper management of asthma and answer Marlene's concerns about the medication, and Trinity made a complete turn around. She made fewer visits to the hospital and gained back much of the youthful energy that her breathing difficulties had taken from her.

Pat explained that a common trigger for asthma symptoms is the presence of cockroaches. Marlene had just moved into the apartment a few months before and shortly after moving in, noticed problems the landlord had not informed her about, including roaches. When she was referred to the Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO) in 2009, Marlene also talked about the "carpet bugs" that were plaguing her family. Up until recently, people had only heard of bed

bugs in old nursery school rhymes. Marlene had never imagined that bed bugs were actually real. She told me how they'd noticed the bugs not long after the family had moved in late 2008. She tried to keep the roaches and bed bugs away with regular spraying but it wasn't working as well as she had hoped. The fumes from the spray bothered her and her family, forcing her to choose between the fumes or the bugs.



Photo: Bed Bugs

We scheduled a home visit. There, we talked about a different, safer, and more effective approach to pest control: Integrated Pest Management (IPM). For the roaches, we used boric acid and roach bait/motels. There were no fumes to aggravate Trinity's asthma, and soon Marlene reported that the roaches were gone. The bed bugs were more difficult and in addition to IPM, Marlene still had to use some pesticides. But after four long months, she's gotten rid of the bed bugs all without her landlord's cooperation. We again discussed her rights as a tenant. After asking several times with no response, Marlene wrote a letter to the landlord explaining the problems she was dealing with. She also called 311 to report the conditions in her apartment.

By September, conditions were better in Marlene's home. The roaches and bed bugs were gone. Trinity's asthma had improved a great deal. In October when Marlene's husband tried to pay the landlord his rent, the landlord told him to "keep the rent, you'll need it to find someplace else to live. Your wife called the city and I was fined." Not long after, her family opened the door to find the sheriff standing outside. The landlord was having her served with eviction papers. I reminded Marlene of the Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance (RLTO) (CH 5-12-150) which states:

A tenant has the right to complain or testify in good faith about their tenancy to governmental agencies or officials, police, media, community groups, tenant unions or the landlord. A landlord is prohibited from retaliation by terminating or threatening to terminate a tenancy, increasing rent, decreasing services, bringing or threatening to bring an eviction action, or refusing to renew a lease agreement.

In court, Marlene wisely asked for a continuance so that she could have time to find an attorney. She then called me and was quickly referred to the Lawyer's Committee for Better Housing. Marlene spoke with an attorney and soon was bringing in all the rent receipts, pictures, and letters she'd kept on hand. At her next court date, her attorney Gerard O'Toole accompanied her to court. During the long months of the trial, Marlene found her family a new apartment with a much more reasonable landlord. By April, she had won her court case. Marlene had proven successfully that the landlord retaliated, an action explicitly prohibited in the Chicago RLTO.

"If you feel afraid, call someone to help you. Reach out for help. It's there. Never retaliate... "So many buildings are messed up. People are afraid to say something to the landlord and it's not good for our kids."-Marlene



Marlene has advice for tenants struggling with their housing situation: "If you feel afraid, call someone to help you. Reach out for help. It's there. Never retaliate. Write a certified letter, keep receipts and paperwork." Marlene wants to be an advocate for people who are afraid. "So many buildings are messed up. People are afraid to say something to the landlord and it's not good for our kids."

*To learn more about your rights, safer pest management, or for information about protecting yourself from retaliation, please call Loreen Targos at the Metropolitan Tenants Organization – 773.292.4980 x 231.*