



NFHA Conference Reflections
By Don Cohn, 2018

My name is Don Cohn, and I'm a paralegal employed as a fair housing specialist at Petaluma People Services Center, Fair Housing of Sonoma County, which is located in Petaluma California. My duties encompass investigation of alleged housing discrimination, conducting legal research, and filing complaints with HUD, California Department of Fair Housing and Employment, or in coordination with private law firms, either in state or federal court. I also conduct fair housing compliance trainings for the housing industry.

The accommodation that made the National Fair Housing Alliance Conference more accessible to me was definitely the communication access real-time translation, also known as CART, captioning. Additionally, it was very assuring to know WID support staff was on-site and willingly available should any unexpected issues arise.



Don as a Disability Ambassador

Disability is important when it comes to housing rights because *home is where the heart is!* This proverb is said to have been in use since time immemorial, among all people. Our homes should be the center of our world, a place of predictability, order, comfort, and solace, in contrast with chaos elsewhere. Having the ability under the Fair Housing Act to request a reasonable accommodation and/or modification of a housing provider policies that's consistent with any needs associated with a person's disability is integral.

First and foremost, all the subsequent panel discussions and Q&A that took place during all the plenary and concurrent workshops was invaluable. Second, the nationwide legal update afforded me the opportunity to have a nationwide snapshot of both recent and relevant housing discrimination cases resolved within the past year. The plenary session called "Where You Live Matters: Fostering Opportunity in All Neighborhoods" I found both informative and affirming. It was very helpful to hear all the ideas on how we might work collaboratively to ensure every neighborhood provides access for all. The plenary session called "Fair Housing in the Next Fifty Years" was also very interesting; for a person who actually performs fair housing investigations, it's essential to be able to stay ahead of the curve regarding critical changes on how consumers access housing opportunities, how industry provides housing and financial services, and how this all ties into technological advancements, Internet-based housing service providers, and shifting demographics.

My experience has been that some of the most effective advocates are found among the Conference Accessibility Initiative's ilk. Providing the impetus for professional and/or educational development by making community development and policy conferences more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities trickles back down, empowering their communities.

Don Cohn is a paralegal employed as a fair housing specialist at Petaluma People Services Center, Fair Housing of Sonoma County, which is located in Petaluma California. With over twenty years in the field, Don has been an integral part of the movement to ensure housing equality for all who seek to live in neighborhoods free from discrimination.