

*There is in the world today a vibrant new culture. It is young and rough, but its birth has been true, and with proper nurturing, its life and growth promise to be dramatic. It is the culture of inclusion.*

—Judith Snow, “In the Spirit of Inclusion”

This manual is designed to serve as a curriculum guide for housing educators and counselors who provide pre-purchase home-buyer education to prospective homeowners with disabilities. It meets Fannie Mae’s home-buyer curriculum guidelines for community lending mortgages as well as for HomeChoice mortgages, which provide special underwriting flexibilities to people with disabilities. Fannie Mae requires lenders who originate these mortgages to ensure that borrowers receive pre-purchase training that accommodates their specific disability-related needs.

We recognize that purchasing a home is a complicated undertaking. Working successfully with lenders, real estate agents, and other housing professionals involved in the home-buying process requires that prospective homeowners have at least a basic understanding of housing-related and financial information with which most first-time home buyers are completely unfamiliar. People with disabilities often face additional obstacles that make the process even more daunting. Because we believe that homeownership is a worthwhile and attainable goal, we have developed this guide to enable housing educators to better serve people with disabilities.

Chapter 1 begins by describing the advantages and disadvantages of owning a home so that you can help your clients decide whether homeownership is right for them. Major issues that you will need to help your clients address include the affordability of owning a home, non-income sources of financial assistance (including disability benefits) that may be available, their credit history (and the possible need to establish a nontraditional credit history), and getting prequalified for a mortgage.

Chapter 2 describes a personalized planning process that many home buyers with disabilities have found helpful. It involves assembling a planning team to help in every phase of the home-buying process and to provide ongoing support to the new homeowner. We provide a detailed example of one successful home buyer’s experiences using this approach. Whether your clients will want or need this intensive level of assistance, they will benefit from many of the planning strategies presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 provides practical advice on shopping for a home, choosing and working with a real estate agent, making an offer on a house, and negotiating the final pur-

chase price. We explain various contingencies that your clients may wish to include in the sales contract, as well as guardianship issues and state certification requirements. We also urge you to emphasize to your clients the importance of a home inspection and planning for accessibility modifications.

Chapter 4 describes the process of obtaining a mortgage. We explain the various types of loans that may be available and how to compare terms so that you can advise your clients when they are shopping for a mortgage. You will walk your clients through the process of completing a loan application and preparing for the loan interview, and you will explain the underwriting process that lenders use in deciding whether to approve or deny a loan. In the event your client's loan application is denied, we also present strategies to overcome this obstacle.

Chapter 5 explains the closing (or settlement) process and the steps your clients must take prior to closing. You can ease your clients' anxiety about the big day by making sure they understand what closing costs they are responsible for and the documents they will be required to sign. We also recommend that you have your clients ask someone who can assist and advise them to accompany them to the closing.

Chapter 6 provides a glimpse of life as a homeowner. You can help your clients by providing advice regarding settling in and meeting the neighbors, as well as advice on safety tips, money management tips, and strategies for maintaining their new home. We also explain what you can advise your clients to do if they ever run into problems paying their mortgage.

This manual concludes with a set of worksheets designed to help your clients throughout the home-buying process. Also included are an annotated resource list for housing educators and counselors, and a glossary.

As a housing educator/counselor whose goal is to help your clients embark on the exciting adventure of homeownership, you are probably aware that your clients with disabilities are among the first individuals with disabilities to travel this road. They are the pioneers, and there are precious few markers and signs to guide them along the way. We are confident that, with your help, the path to successful homeownership for individuals with disabilities will become a well-worn and familiar one.



Throughout the history of the United States, people with disabilities have too often been segregated and isolated from their families and communities. People with disabilities were not allowed to settle in the original 13 colonies when they were established. Later, the immigration policies of the new nation discriminated against people with disabilities.

From the 1700s on, many people with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities were shunted aside into large institutions. Parents of newborn babies who had disabilities were expected to send them to institutions. Families who chose to care for these children at home found there were no resources or assistance available to them.

In the 1920s and 1930s, enactment of the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act enabled many people with disabilities to work in sheltered workshops and to receive income. Asylums were converted to schools, training centers, and developmental centers — suggesting an evolution in the way society thought about the people these institutions were designed to help. Increasingly it was believed that some of these “broken” people, with enough rehabilitation and training, could be “repaired.” In subsequent years, the living conditions for many people with disabilities improved but still remained far below the living standards most other Americans enjoyed.

In the 1970s, independent living programs that advocated the inclusion, or mainstreaming, of people with disabilities in society came into vogue. Even so, most people with severe disabilities continued to live in congregate settings such as institutions, group homes, and nursing homes where they had little control over their lives and were considered incapable of making decisions for themselves.

The 1980s saw a marked shift to moving people with disabilities out of institutions and providing assistance for them in their own homes in a community setting. Even individuals with the most intensive needs for assistance began moving out on their own, deciding where to live, holding jobs, getting married, and having children. Assistance was increasingly tailored to meet individuals’ needs and was delivered at their homes, jobs, and in the community.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed, promising people with disabilities fair and equal treatment under the law. Although this marked a tremendous milestone and has helped overcome legal, attitudinal, and societal barriers, its promise is not yet fully realized. A decade later, at the dawn of the new millennium, most individuals with severe disabilities still do not have control over, or



even a voice in, the most basic decisions regarding their lives, such as where and with whom they live and how they spend their time. Despite the increasing availability of community-based housing and personal assistance services, most of these individuals continue to be boarders who are subject to the rules, schedules, dictates, tastes, and prejudices of their housing providers.

Clearly, people with disabilities, their families, the social service system, and advocates working on their behalf have achieved much. This guide reflects a new vision for the 43 million Americans with disabilities and for the housing industry that has begun to serve them. In this vision, people with disabilities are valued customers and potential home buyers who are afforded the same opportunities, rights, privileges, and responsibilities that all citizens deserve to enjoy.