

Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged in Memory of Carolyn Keane

POPULATIONS OF 10,000 TO 49,999



Apache Junction, Arizona

ICMA's Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged, established in memory of Carolyn Keane, recognizes a local government that has enhanced the quality of life for the disadvantaged, including homeless citizens and people with AIDS. This year, ICMA presents the award in the 10,000-to-49,999 category to the city of Apache Junction, Arizona, and City Manager George R. Hoffman for the Mikki's House program.



Mikki's House residents receive home rehabilitation information.



GEORGE R. HOFFMAN

According to the 2000 census, 31 percent of the homes in Apache Junction, Arizona (pop. 41,104) were built more than 25 years ago, and nearly 12 percent

of the city's population is below the poverty level. Since 1982, Apache Junction had provided some housing assistance through its housing rehabilitation program, but without a place for residents to meet and receive information, and without continuous training opportunities, many homes remained dilapidated and many residents underserved.

In spring 2003, Mikki Frazier of the city's development services department recognized the increasing need for rehabilitated housing for the city's low-to-moderate-income residents. Department employees, facing a long waiting list of homes in need of rehabilitation, worked feverishly to bring this number down. Then, with the waiting list greatly reduced and the backing of the city manager, the department encouraged the council and city staff to support the rehabilitation of a vacant, city-owned house located within a mile of city hall. The entire community pitched in, and the result was Mikki's House, where residents can receive home rehabilitation information, attend lectures, and practice their newly acquired home-maintenance skills.

The rehabilitation of this house has benefited the city and the community in numerous ways:

- *Increased public-private collaboration.* In addition to using its Chamber of Commerce Main Street program, "Paint the Town," to purchase paints at a discount to repair Mikki's House, the city solicited contractors to provide all residents participating in the rehab program with air-conditioning filters and small fire extinguishers.
- *Increased use of community resources.* Through a partnership with Pinal County's Adult Probation Department, the city tapped into the county's community service requirements for the labor needed to paint Mikki's House. This partnership could be used in the future to rehabilitate the homes of residents who are unable to do it themselves.
- *Increased neighborhood aesthetic.* In rehabilitating Mikki's House, the city not only provided a new training center but also improved the overall appearance of the neighborhood.
- *Increased participation in home rehabilitation projects.* Through Mikki's House and its rehabilitation projects, participation in home maintenance counseling has increased. More important, the house enables the city to pro-

vide a refuge away from city hall where "residents are able to retain their dignity and self-esteem when circumstances require that they accept city and federal housing rehabilitation assistance."

Thanks to the program's success, the city now makes greater use of the house by "lending" it to local contractors for seminars, to the city's planning and zoning employees for code compliance lectures, and to the city's Neighborhood Partnership Team to educate residents on property maintenance and other issues important to the mayor and council. By encouraging the local media, cable channel, and the city's magazine, *Cityscape*, to promote the value of Mikki's House to the community, the city also bolsters community involvement in the housing rehabilitation project.

Finally, the project helps the city realize its goal of eventually funding a separate division or department of housing, rather than funding projects through the Arizona Department of Housing and the Community Development Block Grant program. The success of Mikki's House has enabled Apache Junction to help many of its residents rather than resorting to the archaic and inefficient system of helping one resident at a time. ■