



History. Tradition. Community.



Shannon Jones is the Director of Community Engagement at Urban Homeworks. In her role, she analyzes the needs of the community and makes appropriate recommendations for housing programs, policy, and practices within Urban Homeworks and beyond. Urban Homeworks responds to the voices of community by providing dignified housing opportunities, creating space for construction training, weaving together a network of engaged neighbors, and mobilizing volunteers.

In 2012, Jones was hired as a community engagement strategy manager to build relationships with community, connect community to resources, and to provide a safe, respectful way for families to voice their concerns. Shortly thereafter, she began to co-manage the Urban Neighbor Program, a faith-motivated housing program for college students and working professionals. While managing the Urban Neighbor Program, Jones was consistently given more responsibilities and opportunity to expand the community focus of the organization. These efforts led to Urban Homeworks incorporating community engagement as a core principal of its organizational framework. At the time, Jones, who had proven herself as a consummate community organizer, was asked to become the new Director of Community Engagement.

In her new role, Jones implemented several programs designed to get renters and homeowners civically engaged. Jones initiated the “Writing Campaign” which allowed

community members to use their voice to address issues with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Campaign is a process by which community can successfully engage with HUD on a number of issues related to fair housing. This proved so successful that Jones led a second campaign addressing constituent issues pertaining to emotional welfare as it relates to police brutality. Jones leads community listening sessions throughout the Twin Cities with renters, homeowners, and police.

The listening sessions allow for candid dialogue and address major issues such as responsible banking, discrimination, excessive force, and the role of grand juries, and police shootings. Jones says, “These opportunities to engage are essential because community members are telling me, “We want those in positions that affect our lives to know us; we need them to know us.” The listening sessions are a major success with both community and police. Jones says, “I believe things can change. I am committed to doing my part to promote understanding and the need for humanity in policing.”

Jones is experienced in non-profit and community-based work and is passionate about bridging the gap between community and policy making. Jones says, “My job is to keep the community informed and involved in policy-making decisions that affect their most basic needs – housing being one of them.” Jones focuses on connecting renters and homeowners to resources so that individual and communal assets emerge and thrive. Jones is recognized in the Minneapolis community as an innovative leader who leads with compassion.

Most Rewarding Work Experience

Helping to diversify neighborhood associations. I initiated a program that encouraged Urban Homeworks renters and homeowners to get involved in neighborhood associations. At the beginning, lots of residents were uncomfortable with the idea of participating in neighborhood associations. At the end, we had residents represented on many boards throughout the City. They felt empowered and recruited others to do the same.

Beacons of Leadership

Family. I'm inspired by my mother and grandmother because I know the road they traveled was tough, yet they endured. Their efforts allowed me to have opportunities they never imagined. I'm also inspired by my uncle, Richard Green, who was a zealous advocate and never afraid to take initiative. My sister is a strong leader and I'm inspired daily by her work.

Advice for Aspiring Housing Advocates

Be comfortable with people, differences, and yourself. Any role in which you're working with people it can be emotionally exhausting. Don't try to be a hero; this line of thought is too burdensome. Instead, understand people have free will; and your responsibility is to help them make the best choice.

Hometown

- North Minneapolis, Minnesota

Education

- Bachelor of Science in Family Social Science – University of Minnesota
- Masters in Leadership and Management – Concordia University