

Report on Immigrant Discrimination and Mismanagement at Plaza Verde Estates

*Tucson, Arizona * December 2006*



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Introduction

Housing is a fundamental human right and is described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But housing is more than simply a roof over someone's head. Home should be a place where children and their parents feel safe, protected and are able to be themselves, regardless of their nationality, language, religion, culture or any other differences.

People moved to Verde Plaza park because of its quiet location, family atmosphere, and well-maintained grounds. Many of the residents have lived in the Park for years and would like to continue living there. But ever since the new manager, Ms. Assa Minor, took over the position, immigrant and Spanish-speaking residents in particular have dealt with a negative and hostile environment. While immigrant families are disproportionately impacted by the mistreatment and disrespect, it also concerns and affects the non-immigrant residents. Verde Plaza residents would like to address their concerns and resolve this situation. Their basic demand is simple. They want to be treated respectfully by the manager and re-establish a peaceful atmosphere of mutual respect, courtesy, and professionalism.

This report highlights the patterns and trends that were revealed through a documentation process. Residents were trained to document rights violations and fanned out to write up incidents. For the protection of residents', names and other identifying information is not mentioned. The first part of the report presents a summary of issues with examples of incidents. The last section is a series of recommendations that can help create a safe, positive and healthy environment for all residents.

Border Action Network prepared this report based on documentation of the residents' experiences. Border Action Network is a human rights community organization based in southern Arizona that works with immigrant families and low-income border communities to ensure that their rights are upheld, human dignity respected, and that their communities are safe and healthy for everyone. Border Action's priorities include comprehensive immigration reform and seeing the fulfillment of everyone's civil and constitutional rights. At the same time, Border Action believes that for effective, lasting social change, communities must have the capacity to organize, insist in their rights and prevent rights violations.

Below is a summary of the documentation collected by Verde Plaza residents:

Discriminatory Behavior and Intimidation

Latino and non-Latino residents documented differential treatment and discrimination against immigrant residents. When Spanish-speaking residents go to the manager's office with a concern or complaint, they are ordered to speak in English or leave. In one case, she yelled at an elderly Spanish-speaking man because she couldn't understand

him. Many residents reported dreading having to speak to the manager because they feel they will be humiliated for not knowing English or speaking it with an accent.

All Verde Plaza tenants documented incidents of being treated disrespectfully. 100% of residents cite examples of the manager yelling or ignoring residents, where she takes advantage of her position of authority and acts in a hostile and aggressive manner. This repeated behavior has intimidated many families of Verde Plaza.

Letter and Contract Inconsistencies

Residents of Verde Plaza are not against complying with the rules and regulations of the park. Rather, their issue is the way in which the rules are applied and the inconsistent and discriminatory application of the rules.

Some residents have received hostile letters from the manager when she asks that the tenants move out of Verde Plaza, sometimes giving 1-3 days' notice. In another instance, she sent a tenant a letter requesting that her house guests leave her house and if they didn't the manager would call the tow-truck to take their vehicle.

In regards to rules and regulations, tenants document how not all tenants have a copy of the rules and are not aware of what they are. Residents have shown Border Action leaders various versions of the rules; some have received more complete contracts and notice of regulations, while others received other versions and/or less extensive descriptions of the rules.

Residents have also noted differential treatment and double standards concerning the rules. Two residents reported that the manager herself does not abide by the rules and regulations because they have seen her feed stray cats.

Tenants have also experienced contract inconsistencies. For example, one tenant received an eviction letter for riding his motorcycle in the premises. This is after he had already negotiated an agreement with management to allow for it. Another resident was under a 3 year contract, yet unexpectedly received a total of three letters announcing an increase in her rent.

Anti-family Atmosphere

Over 55% of residents document the manager's harassment and intimidation of children. There was an incident where the manager screamed at a tenant's children for playing with a lifesaver. She took them out of the pool and confiscated the pool keys which the tenant pays extra for. When the tenant went to have the keys returned, the manager closed the door on the family's face and gave them no explanation. Other families documented that they are denied privileges and have limited access to pool and picnic area use.

Numerous families have found their children's bicycles and/or rollerblades in the dumpster. In one occasion the manager confessed to a tenant's father-in-law that she probably dumped their bike and rollerblades in the garbage because the children left it in the street.

The manager is reported to prohibit toys on the street, harasses children for playing on the street and does not allow children to play in the basketball courts. She also blames particular tenants for the trash, rocks and toys on the street without knowing for sure if it was their children. In one incident, the manager sent a threatening letter to a resident, falsely accusing her and threatening that if her son kept throwing rocks into the street, they would have to leave the housing unit.

In another case, the manager complained about a family's dog (even though no neighbor had complained) and demanded that the family get rid of it. In order to avoid further problems, the family followed her demands. After getting rid of their pet, their son suffered emotional distress and depression for over a week.

Another complaint cites poor street lighting and glass on the ground as hazardous for their children.

Intrusiveness

Tenants have reported exaggerated and intrusive requests from the manager. While residents respect that rules and regulations should be enforced and are willing to comply with them, the manner in which the manager enforces the rules has resulted in the community feeling threatened and harassed. For instance, the manager has ordered tenants to get rid of their dogs because they bark too much and threatens them with eviction. She asks tenants to turn down their music during the daytime and threatens them with eviction. The manager has also threatened residents to move their vehicles or they will be towed, and has ordered residents to clean their yard and take out weeds because they look too messy.

Lack of Accountability

Residents have attempted to bring attention to problems with the new manager, however, those efforts have been in vain. Residents have also informed park owner and property manager of problems with Assa Minor. However, they sided with management and made no attempts to resolve the situation. In fact, one tenant was told to "not make any waves."

Recommendations

As a result of the Verde Plaza residents have the following recommendations. The purpose of these recommendations is to foster a positive environment at Verde Plaza unit.

We ask for:

- Positive, transparent, and constructive communication ;
- A competent Verde Plaza administration that is culturally sensitive and respectful towards all tenants. The administration needs to be courteous, and willing to pay attention to residents' needs;
- Fair and equal treatment to all park residents: disrespectful language and behavior should not be tolerated from Verde Plaza residents or management alike;
- Any problems management has with any child living at Verde Plaza should be discussed with the child's parents before disciplinary action is taken;
- Hiring of Spanish-speaking Park staff and that all contracts, rules, memos and other documents should be translated to Spanish;
- Copies of one consistent set of rules to be given to all residents and any changes in rules need to be given to all residents;
- Notice of rule infractions to be given in writing and residents should have 10 days to resolve the matter instead of a period of hours determined by the manager;
- Strict and consistent management office hours;
- Recourse for residents to defend themselves in any matter dealing with management;
- Better lighting in the streets;
- Fostering Verde Plaza as a true "Family Park" with a family-friendly atmosphere; this should include an area set aside for the children to use that is safe and welcoming to them.

Conclusion

We expect this to be the beginning of healthy and constructive dialogue. All that residents and families want is to be treated with dignity and respect. Hopefully, all their input and feedback will be taken seriously so that the environment at Verde Plaza can be a pleasant one for all residents.