

## COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT ASSOCIATION OF NORTH CAROLINA



CRA-NC's advocacy has led to tangible wealth creation for low-income people, as in manufactured home communities like the ones pictured above. North Carolina passed legislation that lets owners of manufactured homes with long-term leases obtain mortgages, rather than consumer loans, to finance their homes. CRA-NC is now working with residents to convert their communities to land trust ownership to access this advantageous financing. Core support enables CRA-NC to respond flexibly to changing consumer needs.

### INNOVATION: CREATIVE ADVOCACY

"Core support allows nonprofits to explore creative ways to catalyze social justice and change public policies," states Peter Skillern, executive director of the Community Reinvestment Association of North Carolina (CRA-NC), an organization that works to increase access to banking services and build community wealth for low-income people throughout North Carolina.

One of CRA-NC's innovative strategies is production of a Spanish language soap opera, called *Nuestro Barrio (Our Neighborhood)*. The show combines financial literacy and other community resource information with daytime drama. Storylines include a young man learning the perils of both romantic love and credit card debt, and a doctor who while

dealing with a treacherous ex-husband buys her first home. To vividly illustrate the negative impact of payday lending (short-term loans with sky-high interest rates), CRA-NC produced a 30-minute video called *Payday Lending: the Musical*, and compiled a book of personal stories entitled *Too Much Month at the End of the Paycheck*. CRA-NC also engages in traditional advocacy efforts to ensure that banks comply with the Community Reinvestment Act and has influenced \$40 billion in bank commitments across several states.

"Evaluating the effectiveness of advocacy is not as easy as counting homes built or clients served," explains Skillern. "We ask ourselves—Did the advocacy change policy? How could

it be done better? Are consumers and communities better off?" In terms of reach, CRA-NC knows that one episode of *Nuestro Barrio* is seen by 6,000 households in the Raleigh-Durham market alone; compared to 300 people who participate in CRA-NC's educational workshops each year. In terms of policy, in 2001 there were more than 800 payday lending outlets in North Carolina charging consumers more than \$100 million in fees per year. Today, in no small part due to CRA-NC's advocacy, North Carolina has shut down payday lending. CRA-NC is now working to have a similar impact on reducing refund anticipation loans on tax refunds to low-income consumers.