

## NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING SERVICES OF NEW YORK CITY, INC.



NHS of New York City's marketing efforts include Home Buyers Fairs like this one in the South Bronx (left) attended by over 1,000 prospective buyers. NHS has used core support to expand its outreach. Customers like this Queens homebuyer (upper right) have signed up in record numbers for Home Buyers' Club and Home Maintenance Training. Shaun Donovan, the City's Housing Commissioner, celebrated NHS' 3,000th home buyer with Sarah Gerecke, NHS executive director (lower right).

### RESPONSIVENESS: KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH CUSTOMERS

"Marketing is an area that does not attract a lot of funding," says Sarah Gerecke, chief executive officer of Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City (NHS), an organization that has helped thousands of low-income New Yorkers buy their first homes. "It's hard to make the case that we need funds to improve our website and newsletter. It sounds like an extra activity that's not mission driven. General support from Heron lets us focus on areas, like marketing, which we know are really important to mission without having to wait for a special fundraising effort."

NHS used core support to upgrade its outreach efforts because results from its own customer surveys revealed that homeowners

did not know that the organization has resources to help them over the long haul. "One of the real challenges in our field is that most customers do not let anyone know when they get into trouble paying for their homes," explains Gerecke. A job loss, divorce, major repair, or health crisis can put tremendous financial pressure on homeowners, and unscrupulous lenders are increasingly aggressive in their efforts to take advantage of these vulnerable situations.

So, NHS developed two newsletters and completely revamped its website highlighting services and information for homeowners. A quarterly newsletter is e-mailed to 3,000 people and a hard copy newsletter is mailed to an additional 4,500 homes. Visits to NHS'

bilingual website have grown exponentially from 3,500 hits a year in 2002 to over 17,500 hits per month in 2005. The outreach is having its intended effect. Last year, almost ten percent of NHS' 10,166 new intakes indicated that they came to NHS because of information they saw on its website—it was near zero prior to the upgrade. And NHS has seen corresponding increases in some key services: in 2005, 23% more people graduated from NHS Home Buyers' Clubs and 29% more graduated from Home Maintenance Training. NHS also helped 12% more seniors get reverse mortgages, allowing them to age in place with financial peace of mind.