

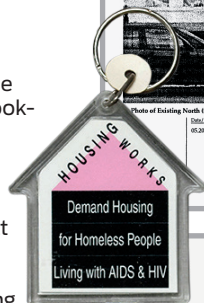
MAKING HISTORY AND HOUSING

Housing Works History explains “how AIDS activists became real estate developers.”

After many years of shopping at the Housing Works thrift shops and bookstores across New York City, Gavin Browning noticed one day that the nonprofit’s logo included a gay pride triangle as a rooftop. “I wondered, What does that mean? What actually is Housing Works?” he recalls. “So I did some research and found out it was this really interesting group that built housing for homeless people with HIV, and it came out of ACT UP in 1990. There was this amazing history right under my nose!”

Currently the director of public programs and engagement at the Columbia University School of the Arts, Browning has a background in urban planning, publishing and architecture. He was so drawn to the story of Housing Works that he got a Graham Foundation grant to create the archive HousingWorksHistory.com, organized as a digital timeline spanning 1990 to 2015. It includes a mind-boggling collection of data and ephemera, such as architectural renderings, T-shirts, details of Housing Works programs, HIV/AIDS rates, city housing policy, court cases, minutes of meetings and videos of speeches—much of which had to be digitized. “I bought one of those TV/VHS combinations on eBay so I could watch bags and bags of old VHS tapes,” Browning says.

As he delved into Housing Works’ closets and file cabinets—“the activists were busy fulfilling their mission, so they didn’t have time to steward their history”—several amazing narratives emerged. “For me, it became a story of how these AIDS activists became real estate developers and how a public health crisis was addressed by architecture,” Browning says. “Plus, there’s that idea of housing as health care, that you can’t get healthy without a roof over your head.”



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A tiny selection of the architectural drawings, T-shirts, posters and ephemera documented in the website’s 25-year timeline about Housing Works

