

Blueprint

SPRING 2020



THE NEWSLETTER OF
Habitat
for Humanity®
of Greater Charlottesville



Kizzy Walker and her daughter Jai.

HOUSING SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

BACK ON MY FEET

Kizzy Walker Finds Stability and Hope through Habitat's Pathways Program

Kizzy Walker is passionate about creating a community where no one has to face “the struggle of choosing between rent and food.” Recently, she put this passion into action when, at a City Council meeting, Kizzy talked about her family's struggle to move up in Charlottesville.

“Places like public and [subsidized] housing were never meant to be permanent. But there are people that have been living there for years, for decades! They can't leave because they can't afford anything else. My mom lived in public housing. I was raised in public housing. Now my oldest daughter is back on Hardy Drive and raising her children in public housing. That is four generations in public housing.”

“When [my family and I] left Charlottesville, it wasn't because we wanted to leave, we left because no matter how hard we worked, no matter how many jobs we had, our wages couldn't keep up with our rent.”

Despite this, Kizzy was determined to find a “forever” home for her family in Charlottesville, where she was born and raised. “I'm not going to give up,” she told Council members before sharing how her resolve brought her to Habitat.

When she applied for the Habitat homebuyer program, Kizzy was living with her two children in a single room in a house shared with other people. “It wasn't a place meant for children or even humans, but it was all that I could afford at the time. When I applied, my income was too low and my debts were too high to meet Habitat's program requirements. But instead of just saying ‘No, sorry you

“But instead of just saying ‘No, sorry you don't qualify,’ they said ‘Yes, and we're going to help you get financially stable first so that you are ready to become a homeowner.’”

don't qualify,’ they said ‘Yes, and we're going to help you get financially stable first so that you are ready to become a homeowner.’” She joined Habitat's Pathways to Housing program.

“The Pathways program helps partner families find innovative, creative solutions to their specific financial and housing challenges,” says Janette Kawachi, Habitat's Chief Partnership Officer. “We work with low-wealth and debt-burdened families to help them achieve economic

Continued on page 7



FROM THE President & CEO

Rising rents, ever-increasing home prices, financial hardships, and difficulty finding high-quality jobs are leaving too many families in our community without a decent, affordable place to live. They need guidance, support and sometimes, a second chance.

In this issue you'll meet a few of the many families who now have a renewed sense of hope through partnership with Habitat. On the cover page, Kizzy Walker describes her struggle to find an affordable place to live in her hometown. On page 6 LaTita Talbert, a mother of six, celebrates her journey from public housing to homeownership. On page 3, Ali Rahimzai tells of his family's escape from war torn Afghanistan to build a better life in Charlottesville. On page 5 Maria Jimenez shares her sense of anticipation for next year's groundbreaking at Southwood, a community of 1,500 people that was once on the brink of elimination. And finally, on page 7, Madison Simmons relates how, after suffering a debilitating injury, she rediscovered a sense of belonging and purpose by volunteering at the Habitat Store.

These stories touch on all three main components of Habitat's work: We build homes, communities and pathways to decent housing; we build community resilience and stability through redevelopment; and we build increased

access to affordable housing through housing system development. All of this work is made possible because of our greatest asset—our neighbors who tap into their own strength and abilities to achieve a second chance, the life-changing benefits of homeownership.



All of this work is based on a solid foundation—our neighbors who tap into their strength and self-reliance to achieve the life-changing benefits of homeownership.



Join me in celebrating these families for their resilience which inspires us every day. And please consider partnering with Habitat as a volunteer, donor, or advocate to support the many in our community still in need of decent housing.

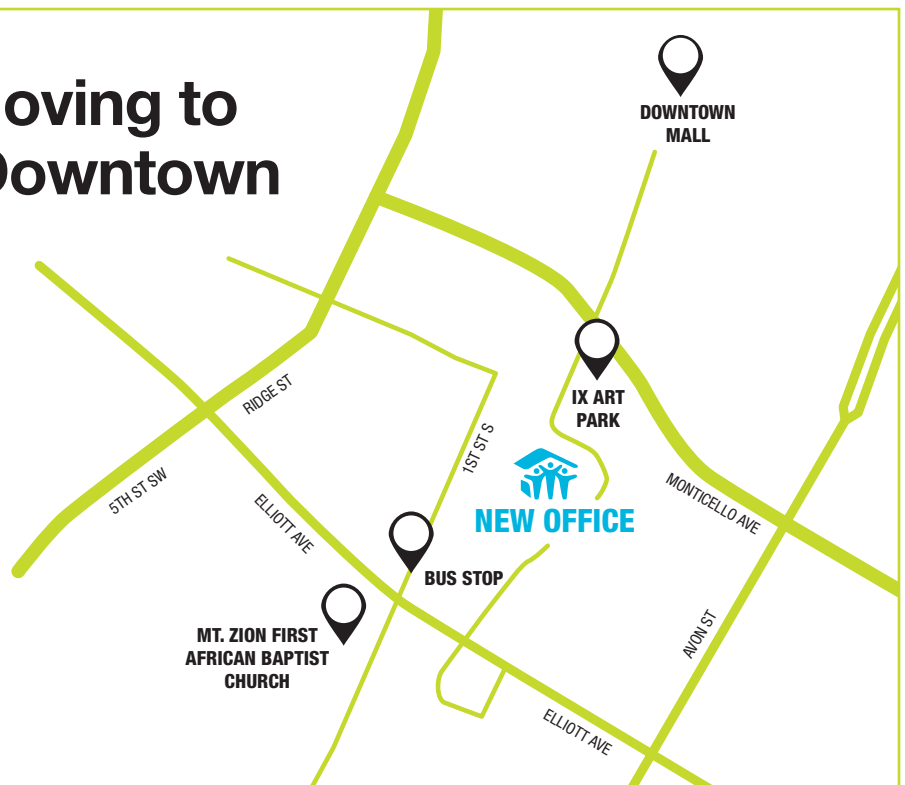
In Partnership,
Dan Rosensweig

Habitat Office Moving to the IX Building Downtown

With our lease ending, we're excited to announce that our office will be moving to the IX Building downtown.

Starting this summer, you can find Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville at **967 2nd Street SE**, just between Portico Church and Studio IX. The new office is only a five-minute walk from the Downtown Mall, is serviced by the Number 6 CAT Bus, and has more than 700 free parking spots on site.

Check our website, e-news, and Facebook page for more details.





 BUILDING

A Father Builds a Beautiful Life for His Family

Sheer Ali Rahimzai and his nine year old daughter, Marhaba

Sheer Ali Rahimzai and his family arrived in Charlottesville five years ago with nothing but a firm and quiet determination to start over.

It had been a long and treacherous road.

In his native Afghanistan, he began driving a truck at age 16, but the long-distance routes kept him away from his wife and children for days at a time. Although it was a hard life, it was at least endurable. However, as fighting escalated in his town, daily threats of violence and even death eventually became too much for them.

“I didn’t want my kids to see that,” he says. “I wanted to save my kids.”

Eventually, he got a job at the U.S. embassy, applied for a special immigration visa, and moved his family around the world to Virginia.

Once in the U.S. he struck up a friendship with the owner of the Grand Market on West Main Street and with others who regularly gather at the international grocery store. “Every day I would go to the store and talk to the guys. They’re really good guys.” He would often bring

his young daughter, and they would enjoy food from his native land. One day the store’s owner suggested Ali apply to Habitat’s homeownership program. The owner’s son even walked with Ali to the Habitat office, and his friends helped him complete the program application.

Determined to purchase a home for his family, Ali worked hard. He started as a handyman, then got a job erecting tents, which was very demanding, physical work. “Very few people stay after one day. I stayed for six months.” Today he works as a delivery driver for the University of Virginia.

While working full-time, Ali has completed more than 300 hours of sweat equity toward the purchase of his new home by working at the Habitat Store and helping Habitat refurbish homes to be resold to new Partner Families. Of course, he and his family are also helping build their own home alongside fellow Habitat Homebuyers and volunteers.

“It’s ours. I made it, my wife made it, my sons made it,” he said recently outside his soon-to-be finished home on Nassau Street in the Belmont-Carlton Neighborhood.

“It will be so good to get the key. I’ll park my car outside my door. My son will say, ‘This is our house.’”

Imagining the day his family finally moves in, a wide smile crosses Ali’s face. “It will be so good to get the key. I’ll open the door. I’ll park my car outside my door. My son will say, ‘This is our house.’ This will be such a special day for me and my family.”

Ali’s smile grows even wider as he recounts a simple request from his daughter. “She said, ‘Dad, I want a swing.’” He already knows the perfect tree in their backyard where she can play safely.

“Talking together, sitting together, eating together, drinking tea, joking together. This is very beautiful for me.”

This summer, the seven-thousand-mile journey for Ali and his family will finally land them at their “forever” home, where they will laugh, talk, drink tea, and live their beautiful life together.

Overhead view of Village 1. This first neighborhood, entirely designed by residents, will be built on land that is currently undeveloped.

Southwood Groundbreaking Scheduled for this Fall



Construction at Southwood will begin this fall, following more than 3,000 hours of planning by Southwood community members and unanimous rezoning approval by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. “This is an incredibly exciting moment,” says Habitat President & CEO Dan Rosensweig. “Community members have done tremendous work, over many years, to get to this point. Now it’s time for all of us to come together to help make the dreams of the wonderful folks at Southwood a reality.”

The site plan for the first model village was submitted to Albemarle County for review last fall and is expected to be approved this summer, setting up a late 2020 groundbreaking.”



Wide sidewalks, numerous benches, and connected back yards reflect the residents' vision for a community that is safe and family-oriented.



Resident planners determined the range of housing types to be built in Southwood, including single-family detached homes, condominiums, townhomes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs).



As residents we have participated a lot to share what we want, what we don't want, and what works for us and doesn't work for us. No one just came and built something and said, 'Here it is.'



"For the last two and a half years we have been going every Thursday to share our ideas at the table," says resident planner Maria Jimenez. "We have participated a lot to share what we want, what we don't want, and what works for us and doesn't work for us. No one just came and built something and said, 'Here it is.'"



Southwood resident planners felt strongly about prioritizing shared open space in the site plan so children can safely play close to their homes.

Now a Homeowner, LaTita Talbert Encourages Others to Partner with Habitat



LaTita and her family at the dedication of their rehabbed Habitat home on 6th Street

LaTita Talbert inspires.

Last month, at the dedication ceremony honoring her and her six children who had just moved in to their renovated home on Sixth Street, LaTita encouraged those without the dream of homeownership in their hearts to follow in her footsteps.

“Trust and believe there is always hope. And if you just keep moving forward,



LaTita and her children on the front steps of their new Habitat home

your feet will end up on solid ground.”

In 2006, LaTita moved to Charlottesville and lived in public housing for nine years before securing a Housing Choice voucher in 2015. “Even with the Section 8 voucher it’s hard, but it’s even harder without a voucher to find a unit that’s inhabitable,” LaTita says.

Her experiences in public housing and challenges with substandard rental properties led LaTita to become an advocate for low-income residents, eventually earning an appointment from City Council to the Public Housing Authority Board of Commissioners.

Still, she continued to maintain her lifelong dream of homeownership.

“If something happened to me today or tomorrow, I can leave my kids something they can say is theirs,” she says. “I think kids learn what they see. And so if they see stability, they’ll reach out for stability, they’ll learn stability.”

LaTita was accepted into the Habitat program in 2017. Although the

Trust and believe there is always hope. And if you just keep moving forward, your feet will end up on solid ground.

process was often challenging, she was determined to succeed. She says Habitat supported her every step of the way. “Habitat offers everything that you need. It’s wonderful. They treat you with respect. They treat you with dignity. They always keep open communication with you, but they hold you accountable.” They told me, ‘We’re not going to do it for you, the team will do it *with* you.’”

Purchasing, rehabbing and then selling homes to local, low-wealth residents is a part of Habitat’s efforts to recapitalize neighborhoods without gentrification or displacement. “By partnering with homebuyers like LaTita, Habitat helps to preserve affordable housing and revitalize communities,” says Habitat President Dan Rosensweig. “In turn, LaTita’s success allows her to build equity for her family and frees up a voucher for another person who will now have access to better housing.”

I know that it’s possible that somebody sees me and says, ‘She did it. I can too.’

Now LaTita hopes her success will help motivate others.

“I’d like to see every [public] housing resident as a homeowner,” she says. “I know that it’s possible that somebody sees me and says, ‘She did it. I can too.’”

Blessings in Disguise: Habitat Store Becomes a Place to Heal

When Madison Simmons fractured her wrist last fall, she was devastated. “I was so furious that I was hurt,” she says. “I couldn’t do anything.”

Madison’s injury prevented her from working her regular job on the packing line at Penny Plate in Fishersville. However, after her initial shock dissipated, her devastation turned to loneliness and she realized that she couldn’t handle being idle. So, rather than sink deeper, Madison jumped at the chance to work at the Habitat Store

through Transition2Work, a program that connects injured employees to local nonprofits during their healing process.

Supporting Habitat’s work is emotionally rewarding for Madison who, despite the hour drive from her home in Waynesboro, wakes up excited to come to the Habitat Store. “I started becoming me again,” Madison says. “It’s a blessing in disguise.”

Through the program, she performs light duties that won’t hinder her recovery while continuing to be paid by her employer. “She’s been incredibly helpful” says David Winder, Habitat’s Store Manager. Over two months, Madison has entered thousands of receipts into the Store’s donation database, updated hundreds of items listed on the E-Store website, and become part of the team of Store staff and volunteers.

Madison wants everyone who comes to the Habitat Store to know how they’re supporting Habitat’s mission. “You may not realize it,” she says, “but this money is helping a family get a home. It’s a roof over a child’s head.”

Once her wrist is fully healed, Madison will return to her job at Penny Plate. But, she won’t be leaving Habitat. “I’m going to come back to volunteer and shop. I’ll remember every single person here,” she says. “I get so excited to come back here and make a difference.”

“You might not realize it, but this money is helping a family get a home. It’s a roof over a child’s head.”



Madison Simmons working at the Habitat Store

The Habitat Store is a retail establishment that accepts donations of building supplies, furniture, and home decor and resells those goods to the community at affordable prices. Net profits then go to support Habitat’s affordable homebuilding operations. Last year the Store raised \$450,000!

BACK ON MY FEET continued...

stability and self-sufficiency and put them on the path to homeownership.”

The program includes intensive financial coaching, housing counseling, homebuyer training, a matched savings program, and job guidance. Families who graduate from the Pathways program can either enter the Habitat Homeownership Program or work with Habitat and others to try to find a starter home on the private market.

For Kizzy, Pathways is helping her create a different future. “Since being in the program,

they are helping me find a better paying job, helping me pay off debts and they helped me get into a safe and affordable housing situation so I could work on my finances and get back on my feet.”

The road has not always been smooth.

Last year, when a couple of setbacks had Kizzy facing imminent homelessness, Habitat found a creative solution, renting her a Habitat-owned house that will soon undergo a major renovation before being sold to a Habitat homebuyer. Her reduced

rent is tied to a structured debt reduction plan. “Living there has helped me to pay off bills so I can get on track to become a homeowner.” Staying in Charlottesville is now a choice.

“Charlottesville is my home, this is where I grew up, This is where I built my relationships. I want to stay. I want my kids to be able to stay and their kids to be able to stay too. And the best way to guarantee that is if I become a homeowner—if we have a safe, stable and affordable place to call our own.”



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WHAT WILL YOU BUILD?



VOLUNTEER

Lend your skills to Habitat. From photography, to childcare, to preparing food, to building homes, EVERYONE makes a difference.



ADVOCATE

Attend community meetings and build relationships with others who care about affordable housing. Contact gtrent@cvillehabitat.org.



DONATE

Help build a more equitable and sustainable Charlottesville. Make a gift to the community today.

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