

Hope Inside



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The light in their faces



How you support a daily dose of love at Head Start

By Rawa Al-Helfi

There is a magical moment that happens when the Head Start classroom door opens.

Whether they are a preschooler, toddler, or even a baby who cannot yet speak, there is nothing more honest or pure than a child's face lighting up when they see their parents at the door. They run to them and throw themselves in their arms.

I am a Head Start mother. The moment my daughter sees my eyes her world stops, and love shatters the air as she runs to hug me like she has never been in my arms before.

But it can be hard to be a Head Start parent.

Several years ago, my family life was deeply shaken and I found myself facing

unexpected challenges. I needed to work. Yet daycare was more than I was going to get paid. It wasn't worth it.

Then my kids got accepted into the Head Start program. I was so thankful. I could work. I still remember my first paycheck – it was about \$500. And that money I got I could save while my kids were receiving great care and love.

I could not have done that without Community Action. **It was a lifesaver for me.**

And donors are what make Community Action Head Start – the chairs, the books, the safe and nurturing environment. Everything in that classroom.

It is what pushed me to where I am right now. Today, I am a Community Action Family Engagement specialist.

I am now a part of the push for families. We're going to support them. Be that motivation. Be there if they need it. Anything to get them moving. We don't want them to start thinking there's no one to take care of them.

And they can do this. **When somebody has a passion for something, or they have a need for it, they will find ways.** Everybody can do anything.

I'm so grateful to have found a place that supported my family when we needed it most. Community Action has given me the freedom and peace of mind to pursue my career. Community Action has given me the opportunity to give back and to grow, all while knowing

my children are in good hands.

I want to say thank you.

Thank you for everything.

Thank you that you believed in the mission. Thank you for the support. Thank you that you believed in me.

Thank you for providing that magical, pure moment when the classroom door opens, and a child's face lights up when they see their parents at the door.

It's beyond great.

You can sponsor a Community Action Head Start classroom

One gift of \$1,500 can provide classroom supplies for an entire year of learning and fun!

If you're interested or want to learn more, contact Jessie Hedrick at jhedrick@communityactionatwork.org or (402) 875-9338.



Joy in the Journey

*Thank you for
your partnership
in cultivating hope*

A couple of years ago, amidst the sounds of drills, hammers and saws, while walking carefully over construction debris, we started to plan a party. We were just beginning phase II of our multi-year building renovation of what is now our Bansal Family Home for Head Start, and the finish line seemed far from sight. (If you've ever been through a renovation, you know the exact feeling!) What a grandiose idea, even for us!

But not for our community partner and friend, Rev. Juan Carlos Huertas of First-Plymouth Church. "We need to have a big celebration when this is all said and done," Juan Carlos suggested to those around him on the tour. "A

celebration for the neighborhood and all the people in it."

The suggestion seemed to immediately clear the drywall-dusted renovation haze that surrounded us. We started an impromptu brainstorm right then and there: There would be food trucks! A battle of the bands! Games! Prizes!

The prospect of an event for all that would bring nothing but joy made the finish line feel a little closer.

That finish line was reached this past summer. Under a brilliant blue October sky, we cut the ribbon on our Bansal Family Home for Head Start. Lincoln's youngest learners had an amazing home for learning.

And we manifested that hopeful day from years ago with an event for the people of Community Action. Neighborhood residents,



Head Start enrolled families, donors, volunteers, anyone and everyone came and celebrated. There were food trucks, games, and prizes; no battle of the bands, a compromise I tentatively agreed to make, but there was music and dance parties!

The dreaming that led to the building that led us to this day was nothing short of grandiose indeed. And we couldn't have reached this point without you.

There was joy, the kind that

only comes from celebrating what it is to live – this experience of being human – together - despite differences, and hardships, and uncertainties.

And there was hope, the type that can only be cultivated by people who believe in people – people like you, and those featured in this newsletter, the people you invest in every day.

You've made it another beautiful year at Community Action. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to partnership and to your community. I hope your holiday season is filled with all the joy, warmth, comfort, and hope you bring to us throughout the year.

Fearlessly,

Heather Loughman

Keeping the heat on

*Your gifts address energy
insecurity with our neighbors*

On Mondays, Community Action's phone rings a lot. Utility bills are due. The furnace is making noises. Hot water is now cold. The paycheck is only so big. **Difficult decisions are about to be made.** Heat or food? Stay cool or medications? Water or heat? It's a circular recipe for poor physical and mental health outcomes for young and old.

It has a name: **energy insecurity.** And it's as scary as it sounds. To Beau, he knows it doesn't feel so great either.

"I was a single dad. No job. Broke. And lived in an inefficient house. The struggle was real. I used Community Action's weatherization services, and it took my



heating bill from \$280 to \$100."

Fast forward several years and Beau leads the Community Action-trained weatherization team.

As a friend of Community Action, you make possible Beau and his team's work to reduce neighbors' energy burden, saving much-needed dollars and improving housing options for our whole community.

The Weatherization team is skilled at installing doors, windows, insulation, energy-efficient appliances, air conditioners, furnaces and other cost-saving home maintenance. After such jobs, Beau now hears what such work means to each participant's life.

"We're so often told, 'You saved me money on utilities – now I can afford to pay for medication, food, so many other things,'" Beau said quietly. "And I'm like, 'I know.'"

As a friend of Community Action, you know the importance of addressing the causes and conditions of poverty within our community. **You make possible our work to address energy insecurity.** That includes small changes like window sealing or replacing a malfunctioning furnace—No matter the size or make of the home.

To Beau, it makes simple sense. "That's someone's home. That's all they have. Why wouldn't we try to make it the best that we can?"

Every day, your support of Community Action makes a remarkable difference. Thank you.

It's something special



For this community we give thanks!

You recently helped something special happen at the Gathering Place.

Outside the big brown house at 1448 E street sat a brown, red, and yellow vehicle. It stood 24 hotdogs tall, 60 hotdogs long, and came in at 140,500 hotdogs in weight. The Oscar Meyer Weinermobile was in the neighborhood!

When “Hotdogger Pip” (aka Luigino from Pittsburgh) stepped out of the Mobile, he had this to say about the crowd in front of him: “This is a really, special community. It seems like a very supportive community – people who live all over who come together. They are there for each other”

The mobile and all the hotdogger staff inside have one mission: to spread joy. While munching on a hotdog, Gathering Place guest Jeffrey, aka Papa Smurf, said that’s what he loves about coming to the Gathering Place. “It’s everybody together. We’ve all got things going on, but it’s a release for people. No matter what is going on, we’re all together.”

By supporting a place for meals to be served, **you have championed a place of support and fellowship.**



You’ve built a community – a place where it is easy to spice up an evening at the Gathering Place soup kitchen with a hotdog mobile tour and meal.

“Events like this offer opportunity to have joy and a new way to engage with neighbors and friends,” said Lisa Janssen, Gathering Place Administrator. “And just have some fun!”

In a year with record-shattering need, being reminded of our mission with a bit of fun is a good idea.

You’ve helped serve over 55,000 meals in the past 12 months. That is a record in our 40-year history. **It is also a fifty-two percent increase over the last two years.**

The Gathering Place relies on your generosity to serve these nightly meals. **Thank you for your commitment to this work, which nourishes so many of your neighbors.**

Whether you like your hotdog with ketchup, mustard, or relish, you can’t serve it up much better than that.

Double your impact

Until December 31st, gifts to Community Action’s Gathering Place continue to be matched \$1 for \$1, thanks to our generous sponsors!

“The Gathering Place supports our neighbors in their time so need,” said Halley Kruse, Vice President and Director of the Acklie Charitable Foundation, lead sponsor. “Not only by providing free, hot, and nutritious meals, but also by fostering camaraderie and hope.”

A complete list of our sponsors can be found on our website. Thank you for bringing hope this holiday season.



'Feeds the soul'

*Generosity and dignity
make the Community
Action Store shine bright*



It's called the Community Action Store. And it's lit from within, by Larry.

"I really love the work we do here," said Larry, Community Action Store Coordinator. "Helping participants and making sure they get what they need when they need it. It just feeds the soul."

Your generosity keeps the Store stocked with top-of-the-list budget-stretching items such as diapers, shampoo, laundry detergent, and toilet paper. Then there are clothes of all sizes and various household items. Larry and dedicated volunteers make sure all items are washed and sanitized before hitting the store floor, where they can be taken home for free.

The Store is open for those who are active

Community Action program participants. As participants set and achieve individual goals, they receive points to redeem in the Store.

After two years on staff and 17 as a volunteer, Larry sees dignity within the effort made by each participant to meet their needs and their budgets using the Store. "Depending on what someone needs, you can get a lot with just 100 points."

And then there's the Holiday Toy Drive.

Last December you donated a record breaking 2,000-plus new, unwrapped toys to cover the Store tables and brighten the winter holiday season for your neighbors.

This year Larry hopes to beat that number. There's one basic reason why.

"I tell ya, the joy and happiness that's on their face when they get something really cool," Larry laughed. "With our toy distribution, we can help hundreds of people every year."

You can donate new, unwrapped toys to Community Action through December 20th to be included in this year's Holiday Toy Drive.

Thanks to you, the Holiday Toy Drive is a light in the dark of winter.

As is the Community Action Store and its Coordinator, Larry. "Hey, I'm just doing my job," he said seriously. "I come here to help people as much as I can, and if I can do that, by the end of the day it's all good."



Community Action is collecting new, unwrapped toys for children age 0-18 through December 20.

Donated toys and gifts will allow Community Action participants to shop for their child's holiday gifts at no cost.

Toys can be dropped off at our 210 O St. office Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.



Scan to purchase a gift directly from our Amazon wish list.

YES, I want to help empower people living in poverty to reach economic stability.

☐ Please accept my gift of \$ _____

Your donation will go toward supporting:

- Feeding those who are hungry at the Gathering Place
- Preparing children for success in school
- Preventing and eliminating homelessness
- Helping families learn financial skills/save for major asset purchases

☐ I would like to designate my gift to the following program (e.g. The Gathering Place, Head Start, Basic needs supplies for families)

☐ I have included (or intend to include) Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties in my will or estate.

My name _____

Company _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

May we publish your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, how would you like your name(s) to appear? _____

Payment Options:

☐ Check payable to Community Action

☐ Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Account # _____

Exp. Date (mo/yr) _____ Security Code _____

Signature _____ Date _____

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