

Children's Home Initiative: Hope – *and Homes* – for Homeless Families

Every day, Foundation Communities gets at least four calls from families in crisis who have found themselves suddenly homeless.

For many, it's one major life event that's the final trigger—an unforeseen and unexpected circumstance. The result is that a shocking one in four homeless people in Austin are under the age of 18. And that's why Foundation Communities launched the Children's HOME Initiative (CHI) in 2003.

The Children's HOME Initiative helps homeless families with children get back on their feet again—and that starts with a stable place to live. CHI offers families who qualify (those whose income is 30 percent or less than the median family income) an apartment at substantially reduced

rent, programs and services through a structured case management program, and the support they need to create a more stable environment through the 18-month program.

"The Children's HOME Initiative is the only transitional housing program where residents don't have to move when the program ends," explains Danette Lopez-Garza, Senior Case Manager.

"After 18 months, the only thing that changes is the rent goes to the regular affordable rate. Many families choose to stay in their apartment, even after they graduate."

Continued on next page...

Thanks for your generosity this Holiday Season!

2009 was tough year for many of us, particularly for FC residents facing job loss or reduction in hours. We had more requests for holiday assistance than ever before—and you came through!

This year, the generosity and support of our amazing sponsors provided gifts and surprises to 179 Foundation Communities families.

For the past five years, Foundation Communities has operated a holiday assistance program to sponsor deserving families in need and, thanks to you, 2009 proved to be our most successful year yet! Many Foundation Communities families were prepared to have very little in the way of holiday gifts and celebration, and without our unparalleled success this year, that scenario would have been the case for most.

For the first time ever, the holiday assistance program was able to match sponsors with all 73 families who applied! And 106 "holiday baskets" were provided for Foundation Communities families who did not apply for sponsorship, but who still needed a little help.

Sponsors were incredibly generous and did a phenomenal job of sponsoring these families! From giving many kids their very first bikes to food for holiday meals—and even a brand-new computer and special learning software to the family of a special needs child—there's no doubt that 2009 will be a holiday to remember for these deserving families.

"I just wanted to get a tremendous thank you out there to whomever it was who helped my family with Christmas this year," said resident Sandra Colvin. "It's been tough going for us for quite a while, and this generosity was such a huge blessing. This was the best Christmas I can remember in 15 years!"

We at Foundation Communities, as well as the families who received your generous gifts, are incredibly grateful for the time and effort you put into making this past holiday a special one. Impactful programs like this one continue to exceed their goals based on continued community support. Thank

you to everyone involved for making this year the best!



Access to Help, Housing – and Opportunities

It's hard enough dealing with homelessness, and for families with children, not having a place to call their own is a scary and uncertain prospect.

But because of CHI and case managers like Lopez-Garza who are committed to their clients' success, families have access to a positive place to live, weekly case management services, help finding employment, childcare and on-site after-school programs.

Foundation Communities currently has 63 units in its communities set aside for CHI families. And, with the recent addition of two new properties, CHI will have a total of 102 dedicated units for this important program.

While Foundation Communities will continue to provide this critical service to Austin families, we need your help to do it. With a funding gap of at least \$500,000 for the expansion of the program into the two new properties that FC is currently working to fill, community support is more important than ever for completion.

"It's about providing a safe, affordable and stable place to live and creating opportunities for all

members of the family—and we can't do that without community support and your donations," says Walter Moreau, Foundation Communities' executive director. "Our goal is to teach families the financial and life management skills they need to break the cycle of homelessness for good."

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—Walter Moreau

New to Austin, Faye Goggins Discovers the Right Resources for Success

When Fayetah "Faye" Goggins was laid off from her job of 16 years in 2006—a job she thought she'd have forever—life simply became too much to bear. "The cost of our rent and utilities went up," she recalls. "I thought I was set until I was laid off, but even with an associates degree, I couldn't find a job."

The single mom of three boys, ages 16, 11 and 7, Goggins lived in a hotel for two weeks to research places to live and work. But with rents higher than anticipated and the up-front costs of moving out of the family's initial budget, it was clear that the family's situation was becoming desperate.



"If it weren't for Foundation Communities and this program, I wouldn't be where I am today."

— Faye Goggins

In need of assistance; stable, affordable housing for herself and her children; programs and healthy outlets for her boys, Goggins found out about the Children's HOME Initiative. And it turned out to be the family's saving grace. "I met with my case manager and we talked about my goals, what I wanted for myself and my kids," she says. "They let me know what I qualified for and the best way to make the transition to a stable home."

Soon, Goggins and her family were living at Sierra Ridge, at a rent they could afford. Goggins was also able to secure full-time work with help from CHI, as well as enroll her kids in good schools. The after-school programs provided the additional foundation for a healthy, stable childhood experience. "My middle son is disabled, and not all schools can meet his needs," says Goggins. "CHI helped me to advocate for his rights and helped me to become more knowledgeable—and helped us all develop confidence."

After going through the full CHI program, Goggins and her children are well on their way to realizing the dreams they've always wanted. Her youngest son is in the gifted and talented program in elementary school, her middle son is on the merit roll at his junior high school and her oldest son is thriving on multiple levels.

"My oldest was never on the honor roll where we used to live, but here he is, and he's president of the youth teen council for Campfire USA," she says proudly. "They have really excelled, and I think a lot of that is improved self-esteem. Each child has a need that's met, and as a single mom, I find that extra support essential."

As for Goggins herself, she's always wanted to start her own business, and CHI has helped her find mentors, programs and education to make that dream a reality. "If it weren't for Foundation Communities and this program, I wouldn't be where I am today," she says. "When you make a move, you want to know you did the right thing. Today I realize that, yes, I did the right thing."

How You Can Help

Help us serve Austin's homeless families and children. Your support is critical.

Through your efforts, we can make a difference in the lives of these families and children. We appreciate all your help!

Here's four ways you can help:

- 1 Sponsoring a family—this is a year-round need.
- 2 Helping with rental subsidies (\$383/month).
- 3 Providing case management and other services (\$1,700/year per family).
- 4 Purchasing basic household items for families when they move in—many come to us with nothing at all.

Tyneisha Williams Proves *Anything Is Possible* with a Little Help

When CHI case manager Danette Lopez-Garza met Tyneisha Williams late last fall, she was working at a coffee shop. She and her toddler son had just been kicked out of her mother's house.

By this point in her life, Williams had done more living than most 18-year-olds. She was the primary caretaker for four of her six siblings, coping with a single mother who had ongoing substance abuse issues, trying to provide a stable life for her young son and working on getting an education for herself. Finally, it all became too much to handle.

Her mother's house wasn't a reliable, healthy refuge for Williams and her son. She'd been to Pasadena, Texas to stay with a friend and to Chicago to see if things might work out with an older sister, but neither offered the stability she so desperately needed. By the time Williams met Lopez-Garza in August 2009, she had nowhere to go and was unsure what to do. "I'd tried living with my mother, but thought it was better to step back from that situation," she says. "All I wanted was a permanent place to live."

Williams had applied for public housing through HUD in 2007, but the process is a long one, and nothing ever came of it. Lopez-Garza introduced her to Foundation Communities, helping her with an application for the 18-month CHI program and

a home at Sierra Ridge, where Williams could find a job, find care for her son and get back on her feet. Williams beams when she says she moved in on September 17: her 19th birthday. She says it was the best birthday present ever. "I didn't think I'd be able to enjoy my birthday, but that was such a cool blessing," she says. "I'm very independent and wanted to make it on my own. Going back to my mom's was tough. I saw what my mom was doing growing up, and I did the opposite."

Today, Williams is in school at Austin Community College to earn her associates degree and has a specific set of life goals and a fierce drive that's far beyond that of a typical 19-year-old: Get degree. Get a BA from culinary school by age 26. Work and save four years to save money. Open own restaurant by age 30. Move back to Chicago by age 45 and open restaurant franchise. Get licensed in American Sign Language as a Plan B—just in case the restaurant business doesn't work out. "That's my dream," says Williams. "I take care of everyone but me. It's so good to think about my future. It's life-changing."

Williams has recently chosen to see a counselor regularly to help deal with her difficult past, and pave the way for a positive future. "We can tell clients to go talk to a counselor, but Tyneisha is the one who's requesting it," says Lopez-Garza.



"People say I'm not a typical 19-year-old. Life has been hard. It's nice to know that out of everything, I'm still sane. But I pray, I'm focused and I believe."
— Tyneisha Williams

"She's the leader of the family and has done the family good, but it's time to take care of herself." No matter what, Williams knows she is the exception to the rule, and isn't for one second going to take that for granted. "People say I'm not a typical 19-year-old," says Williams. "Life has been hard. It's nice to know that out of everything, I'm still sane. But I pray, I'm focused and I believe."

Help Spread the Word about Foundation Communities!



David Tandy
CEO, Gracy Title
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After two decades in Austin, you would think that Foundation Communities would be a local "household name." However, we constantly hear "I never knew about these programs here in Austin!"

To spread the word, we hold an Open House each month at one of our communities. This is NOT a fundraiser, simply a deli lunch and a short program to introduce Foundation Communities. This "Tell a Friend" concept has been instrumental in bringing many new volunteers and supporters over the past few years.

This winter, we were lucky to have new volunteers step forward and host these Open House events. Our very special thanks to David Tandy, CEO of Gracy Title, as well as Laurie Loew and Robin LeTourneau of Give Realty.

David attended an FC event last fall and was so moved by the presentation that he got his whole company involved. They helped to paint the new Community Financial Center, sponsored families in our Holiday Giving program, and joined as a HomeBuilder with a five-year pledge commitment. David also hosted both the January and March Open House events. "We

were so happy to paint the new center and have been inspired by the work of Foundation Communities," says David Tandy. "We look forward to finding other ways to help and to expanding our involvement in the coming years."

Robin and Laurie are also new volunteers. They hosted the February Open House and have featured the Community Tax Center program in their advertising to clients. We can't thank them enough for getting involved, and we hope their dedication might inspire you.

Hosting an Open House involves inviting 20 of your friends and family members to the event, and then introducing the program. Our staff will handle the RSVPs and all of the program details. Your guests will not be asked for financial support but they are likely to become very inspired about FC.



Walter Moreau, Robin LeTourneau and Laurie Loew at the February Open House
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Ways You Can Help

To learn more about how easy and rewarding it is to host an Open House, contact Keary Kinch at 610-4024 or keary.kinch@foundcom.org.

Community Financial Center Opens with More Services – and Hope for the Future

When it comes to finances, everyone needs a little help. Sometimes a little help goes a long way, which is exactly the case for Jorge at the Community Financial Center.

A City of Austin employee and father of six, Jorge first came to one of FC's Community Tax Centers four years ago just to get help filing his taxes. FC helped Jorge file his return correctly for free, saving hundreds of dollars in fees. But the story doesn't end there.

While at the tax center, he noticed that he could get a loan that would help his wife pay for her citizenship papers. The couple applied, and Jorge's wife was able to complete the citizenship process. But the story doesn't end there. Jorge and his wife came back to FC, amended their past year's tax returns and got back a whopping \$8,000 refund. Soon after that, they decided to open one of FC's matched savings accounts and start saving for a home of their own.

This year, Jorge was proud to come back to the financial center to get help with the closing documents for his family's new home! He even saved some money to surprise his wife with a new washer and dryer. But the story doesn't even end there.



At the new Community Financial Center, Jorge is now working with a volunteer to fill out the complex FAFSA financial aid forms so his oldest child can afford to go to college.

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 "Four years ago, I just came here to get my taxes done," says Jorge. "I had no idea you could help me and my family fulfill our other financial dreams."

Community Financial Center: More Than Just Taxes

Jorge's success story is just one illustration of how our tax centers have grown way beyond tax help. Now, with the grand opening of Foundation Communities' new Community Financial Center, we can do even more.

Austin families now have a "one-stop shop" to work on their financial goals. FC purchased and renovated an office building in south Austin and transformed it into the new Community Financial Center—a financial hub that will serve families year-round with a whole range of financial services. Folks can get help with free tax preparation, as well as financial coaching, cash for college and help buying their first home, among other services.

Foundation Communities' tax centers alone help file 17,000 tax returns and secure more than \$27 million for Austin's residents each year. This free service saves each family about \$200 that would have been spent for a tax preparer—funds that many families on a tight budget don't have.



Many clients have used the service several years in a row and appreciate the knowledge of FC's staff and volunteers. Because of the relationship of trust we build with tax center clients, many can now also turn to FC for help with other money challenges.

"Our goal with the Community Financial Center is not just to get folks the refund they deserve under the law, but also to use that refund wisely. That means helping with financial coaches and working on savings goals," says Walter Moreau, FC Executive Director.

None of the services at the center would be possible without a dedicated crew of volunteers, over 600! This year, volunteers had training that focused on the many specific tax relief benefits under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), passed in 2009 to help jump-start economic recovery.

The new building is also large enough to keep up with the growth of the tax preparation service. "Within two weeks of operations, our Community Tax Centers saw a nearly 30 percent increase in the total number of tax returns we've prepared so far," says Alpha Balde, Community Tax Center manager.

Many of those clients are just getting tax help, but some will end up achieving so much more. As Jorge says, "I always dreamed of owning a home in Austin, and making sure my kids get on to college. Thank you Foundation Communities for the boost I needed to make it happen."

Ways You Can Help

» **Volunteer** to help with financial coaching. Our clients need your help year-round. **Contact Mary Baird for details: mary.baird@foundcom.org.**

» **Sign up** this fall for tax preparation training so you're ready to volunteer next year. Training is eight hours and an IRS test—and has been a very rewarding volunteer opportunity for many. To put your name on a list for next year's training opportunities, **please email Jackie Blair at jackie.blair@foundcom.org.**

» **Donate.** The Charles Schwab Foundation has generously funded initial building renovations at the main center, but more are planned for 2010 that will require about \$150,000 to complete. Call Foundation Communities for more information about how you can help! **512-610-4024.**

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