

habitat[®]

THE MAGAZINE OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY





The urgency to serve

The idea of serving God by serving others has been written on my heart for as long as I can remember. I recall vividly the childhood visits with my grandmother when she would challenge my siblings and me to be useful. And that was not just a nice thought accompanied by a pat on the head.

My grandmother was Millicent Fenwick, a pipe-smoking New Jersey congresswoman who was committed to issues of social justice. She demonstrated bold determination in taking up the cause of those who needed an advocate to make their lives better.

She would also recite to me what she called her “life verse” from the Bible, Micah 6:8, which says we are required to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.

Those words have had a profound influence on me and became very real when I was on a mission trip to India years after my grandmother’s death. There, I encountered such hopelessness among a group of Dalit children, commonly called “untouchables,” and I knew God was reaching out to me. I was fairly sure that I wanted to devote the rest of my life to helping those living in the world’s poorest places.

It would be a long time before I received the phone call about the CEO job at Habitat for Humanity, but I had continued to look for ways I could serve. I believed I could — and should — be a positive influence in the business community, and I found great joy in helping others. I was not a person who could sit on the sidelines when I saw people suffering. I often felt the powerful call to get up and do something.

I think that is what attracted me to Habitat. Our vision to create a world where everyone has a decent place to live offers people — motivated by a variety of reasons — the opportunity to make a difference. We are so grateful for the millions of people who have come to job sites to help families build or renovate their homes. And we are excited that accountants, lawyers, students, people with warm telephone voices and so many others have also found such innovative ways to contribute.

This issue of Habitat includes essays from Habitat supporters who explain the urgency they felt to serve. What is it about people living in desperate situations that is calling you to respond? How is God challenging you to be useful?

Jonathan T.M. Reckford
Chief Executive Officer
Habitat for Humanity International

HABITAT’S VISION

A world where everyone has a decent place to live

Driven by the vision that everyone needs a decent place to live, Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 as a grassroots effort on a community farm in southern Georgia. The Christian housing organization has since grown to become a leading global nonprofit working in more than 1,300 communities throughout the U.S. and in nearly 70 countries.

Families and individuals in need of a hand up partner with Habitat to build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage.

Through financial support, volunteering or adding a voice to support affordable housing, everyone can help families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives for themselves.

Through shelter, we empower. To learn more, visit habitat.org.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU

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Carter Work Project

As Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary, the Carters and their fellow volunteers helped 150 families build and improve places they can call home.

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Building back

Habitat Nepal continues to help families and communities recover, two years after devastating earthquakes in the south Asian country.

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Stand up for quality, affordable housing

Making sure more families have decent places to call home is absolutely vital to the health, well-being and stability of our communities.

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Thank you!

Celebrating the in-kind donations that help us build.

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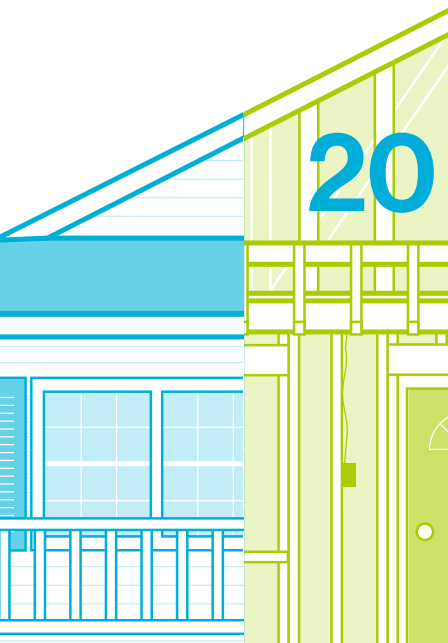
Why we serve

President Carter and other Habitat supporters and volunteers share what motivates them to help their neighbors.

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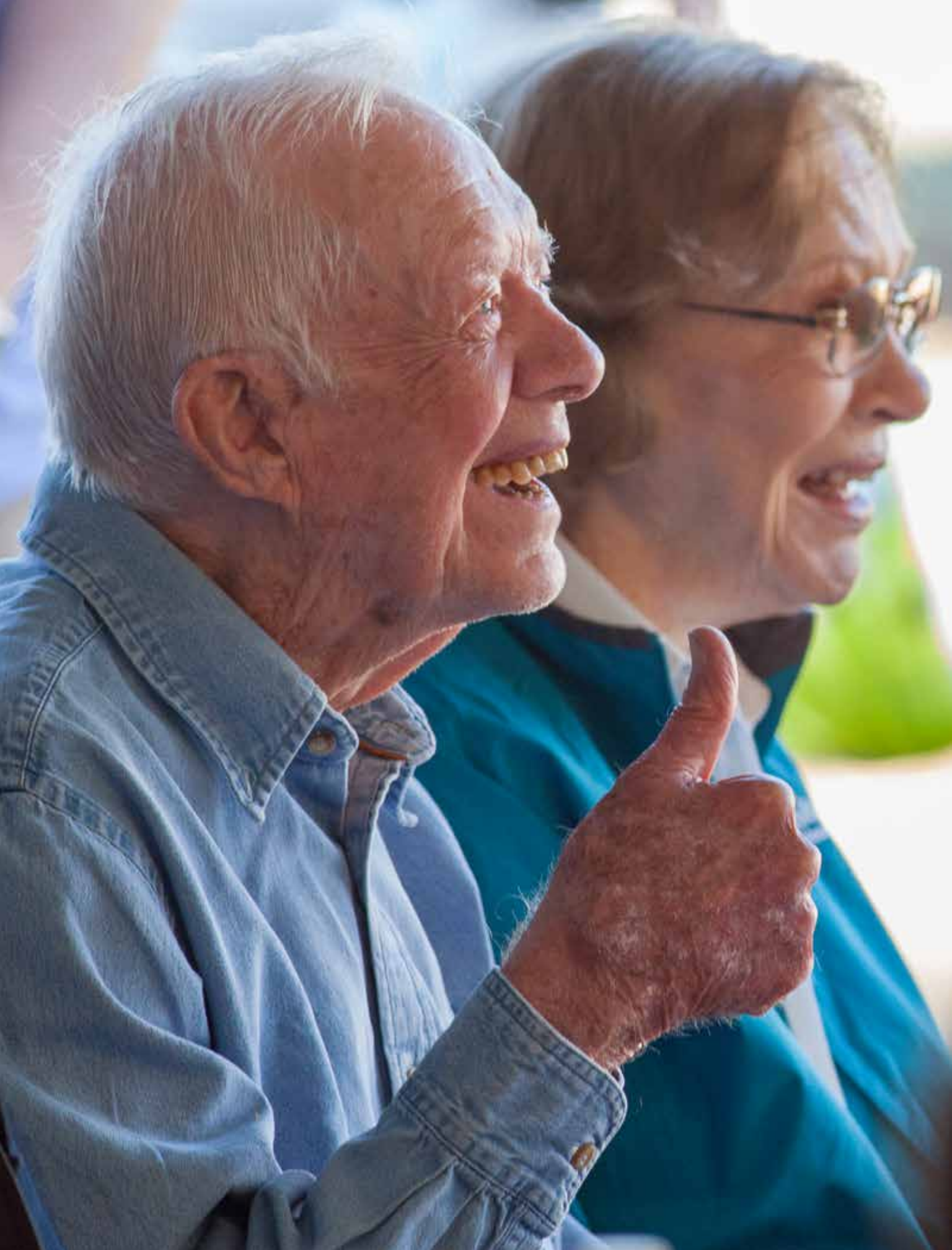
Shaping future Habitat leaders in Asia-Pacific; creating healthier homes in India and Paraguay.

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Spotlight

New additions and other great items in Habitat’s official online store.

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“

My mother was a registered nurse, and she was gone a lot, particularly at night. African-American women brought me up and taught me about my proper relationship with God and with my fellow human beings. I saw the ravages for both black and white people of official racial segregation. That was a good start for me because I learned from that personal experience lessons that I have tried to exemplify later on in my life.

The Carter Center, where Rosalynn and I both work, and which we founded a number of years ago, is dedicated to human rights. I think one of the basic human rights that has made the most impact on my life since I left politics has been the realization that a basic human right is to have a decent place to live.

We have seen the transformation in a family's life when they have a decent home, where the teenage children stay off the street in the afternoon after school and are very proud to bring their friends to their home where they live now: a Habitat house.

So I look upon all of you volunteers, in a very sincere way, as human rights heroes, and I thank you for it.”

President Carter, from his closing remarks at the 34th Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project, held at sites across Canada July 9-14

NEPAL

Continuing the recovery



The Pipaltar community in Nepal continues its recovery two years after devastating earthquakes, as a total of 87 families have partnered with Habitat Nepal to rebuild their houses, improving their health and livelihood prospects in the process.

Pipaltar is located in the Kavrepalanchok region, one of the hardest-hit districts. Maiya lives in nearby Panchkhal and also has worked with Habitat Nepal to improve her family's housing situation. She and her family first built a temporary shelter using a Habitat kit distributed



immediately following the earthquake. Now, she has started to construct permanent shelter with assistance from Habitat Nepal's Housing Support Service Center, all while caring for her ailing husband and providing for her grandson's education.

"Without the support from Habitat for Humanity, I could not have imagined building a permanent house," Maiya says.



pot

ASIA-PACIFIC

Shaping future Hab

After mobilizing more than 6 million young people over six successive campaigns, Habitat for Humanity's Young Leaders Build is set to take Asia-Pacific youth engagement to the next level through a new leadership training program.

"We used to say 'today's builders, tomorrow's leaders,' but youth really are today's leaders in building and today's leaders in communities," says Rick Hathaway, Habitat's Asia-Pacific vice president. "What we're pioneering now is an effort to equip youth with more leadership opportunities."

In partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership, a global



Residents in southeastern Europe and the Russian Commonwealth region can pay as much as half their incomes on utility costs, according to a USAID-sponsored energy report.

Habitat recently made recommendations for fighting this kind of energy poverty by helping homeowners associations to retrofit buildings and housing management to focus on energy efficiency, with the ultimate goal of renovating large-scale residential blocks to help bring down high heating costs for homeowners.



“I want my 6-year-old daughter to have a childhood home. I never had a stable home to thrive in. I know this will help her have the best shot at succeeding.”

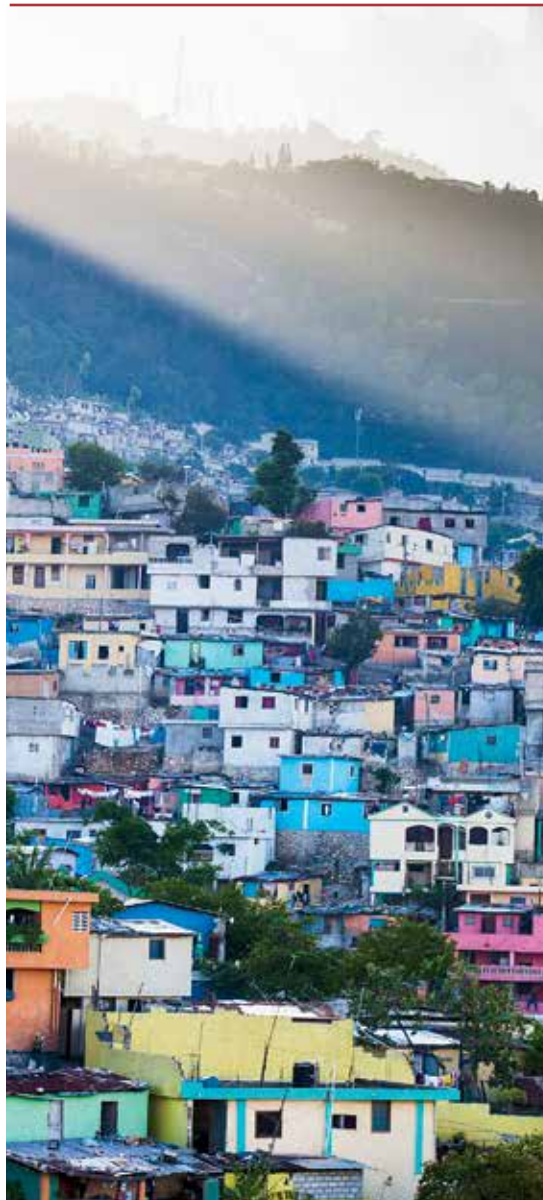
Elizabeth, Habitat Metro Louisville homeowner

essential

Habitat leaders

Leadership development organization headquartered in North Carolina, Habitat Asia-Pacific is creating a leadership toolkit with resources that include tools to deepen understanding of Habitat’s mission, instruction on how to develop leadership skills, and training on how to design and implement projects that contribute to the United Nations’ sustainable development goals.

The program has piloted in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore and will officially be rolled out across seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region in late 2017.



HAITI

Small loans, big steps

A partnership with Habitat for Humanity, the Affordable Housing Institute and the World Council of Credit Unions, the USAID pilot program called HOME helps low-to-moderate-income families in Haiti apply for small loans to build or rehabilitate houses.

To date, more than 450 affordable HOME loans have been delivered through local co-ops or credit unions in Port-au-Prince, St. Marc and Cap-Haitien. The program’s three-year objective is to help 1,750 families build or improve a place they can call home by offering housing finance and technical assistance.

“I had never requested a loan for construction because I was sure that someone like me could never get one,” says program participant Joselande. “Financing a house, borrowing to build, is something I thought was reserved for rich people.”

ARGENTINA

Creating access to clean water

Celina and Mariano once had to walk nearly five miles every day to a well where they would use plastic bottles to collect water for themselves and their goats. And sometimes, the well would be dry.

“We had to wait for rain,” Celina says, “but that oftentimes did not come.”

Desperate to find a solution, Celina heard from her sister about Habitat Argentina and decided to apply for a small loan to improve their housing conditions. With the help of Habitat volunteers and technical assistance, Celina and Mariano built their own water tank. Now, as they continue to pay back their loan, they have access to clean water for themselves and their livestock.



“We hope that more families in Argentina can also partner with Habitat so they can improve their quality of life,” Celina says.

RECENT READING

Preserving affordability

Affordably priced homes are lost at an astonishing rate in the United States.

In some cases, the buildings themselves disappear, destroyed by natural disaster or demolished because of wear and tear. More often, the buildings remain, but the economically precarious families who once occupied them no longer do. This can happen because of sudden catastrophes like the Great Recession of 2007-2009 or, more often, because of relentless appreciation in the value of local land and housing, pushing rents and prices beyond the reach of people of modest means. Affordability is allowed to disappear, along with public and private subsidies that initially made these homes affordable.

Many nonprofit housing providers, advocates and policy makers have become increasingly concerned about these losses, and an increasing number of communities have begun taking action, seeking a more sustainable way to invest increasingly scarce local resources.

Habitat for Humanity’s 2017 Shelter Report, “Affordable for Good,” highlights the benefits of shared-equity homeownership strategies and related public policy choices that enable lower-income households to become homeowners while creating permanent community housing assets.

Read the full report and see Habitat’s policy recommendations at habitat.org/about/advocacy/resources.

Habitat’s global advocacy campaign, **Solid Ground**, which helps countries address housing problems through advocacy that mobilizes people and influences laws and policies, is now active in 30 countries around the world. From Peru to Poland, the campaign seeks to improve land rights, fight for gender equality in property ownership, upgrade slums and create disaster-resilient communities. Learn more at solidgroundcampaign.org.



Affordable for good

Building inclusive communities through homes that last



First

Habitat for Humanity nationwide cause movement launched in April 2017. Through the “Home Is the Key” campaign, Habitat and our partners called attention to the critical need for affordable housing across the U.S. and activated consumers to join the cause. Learn more about this annual campaign at habitat.org/homeisthekey.



\$17.14

Hourly wage, on average, that a U.S. renter would have to make to afford a one-bedroom apartment without spending 30 percent of income on housing, according to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition’s “Out of Reach” report.

The NLIHC estimates that the average hourly wage of renters in the U.S. is \$16.38.



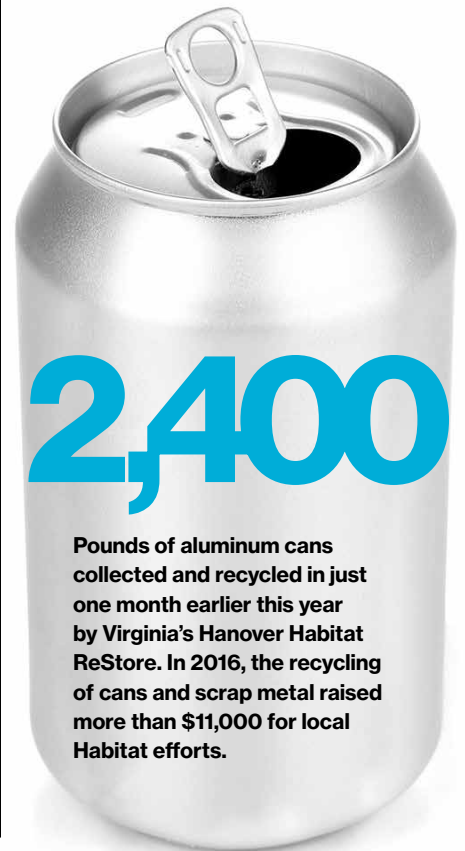
2,000+

Veterans and their families who have partnered with Habitat’s Veterans Build to improve their housing since 2013. The program also provides volunteer and employment opportunities to U.S. veterans, military service members and their families.



65&73

Percentages of Americans and Canadians, respectively, who say they’ve experienced difficulty paying housing costs at some point in their lifetime, according to Habitat’s 2017 affordable housing survey. Nine out of 10 of the surveyed populations combined say it’s important to find a solution to the lack of affordable housing.



2,400

Pounds of aluminum cans collected and recycled in just one month earlier this year by Virginia’s Hanover Habitat ReStore. In 2016, the recycling of cans and scrap metal raised more than \$11,000 for local Habitat efforts.





There has never been a more important time to stand up for quality, affordable housing.

We know that making sure more families have decent places to call home is absolutely vital to the health, well-being and stability of our communities. Of our neighbors. Of all of us.



Beginning the journey to affordable homeownership requires courage — and a vision for something better. Each Habitat homeowner works hard to complete their financial education and perform their sweat equity, and it's their commitment and resilience that carries them through to their destination: a home of their own, one they helped build.

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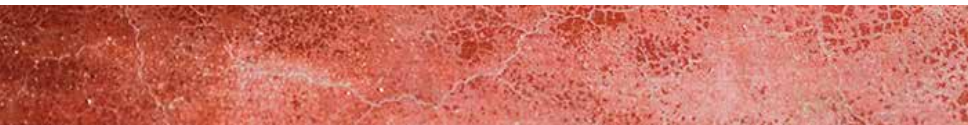


“I have a strong faith, but the Word of God tells me that faith without works is dead. So what did I do? I lit up my faith, and I said to myself, ‘No, I will have my house.’”

“There were 10 to 15 people who came with such desire, as if this house were for them. As if they knew me. The house was something that they themselves wanted to finish because they did not get tired. They told me it encouraged them that I did not lower my arms.”

“You see the achievement. You see what I have today.”

CELIA, HABITAT ARGENTINA HOMEOWNER





“This house opened up a whole new world for us.”

**JANET, HABITAT CHARLOTTE
HOMEOWNER**





potential



Having a decent place to live and access to an affordable mortgage or loan means Habitat homeowners can save more, invest in education, pursue opportunity and have more financial stability.



With your help, Habitat will always advocate for and partner with those among us who must be remembered, who must be allowed opportunity, who cannot be cast aside.

Through shelter, we empower.



partnership





“Habitat means somebody giving you their hand when you’re just at your lowest and pulling you up and helping you every step of the way. Not everybody can say that they built their own house and that they worked so hard to have such a beautiful home. My kids are very, very proud. I tell them,

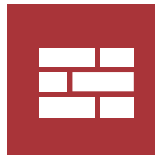
‘If you see me do it, you can do anything.’”

BRENDA, HABITAT TUCSON HOMEOWNER





When we come together to build, we have truly transformative experiences — ones with lasting and tangible outcomes. And every home that we build or improve helps to strengthen the fabric and economies of the cities and towns in which we all live and work.



community



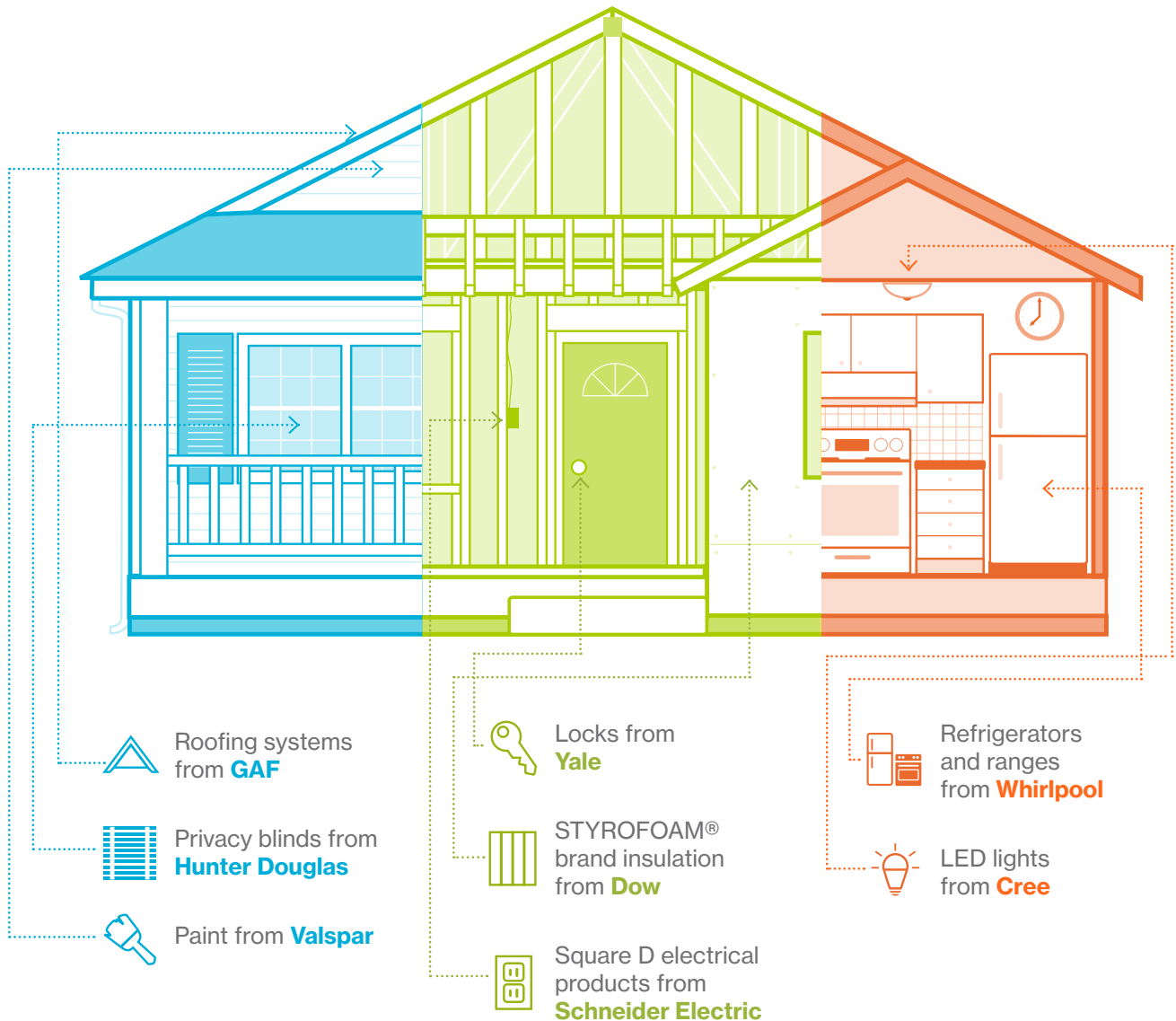
“I think people, deep down, want to make a difference. I think that giving sparks a little bit of hope in them.”

CAMERON, HABITAT WILLIAMSON-MAURY VOLUNTEER



Life is rarely an easy path for any of us. For those who have known more hardship than opportunity, a helping hand — a hand up — is often all they need. Your generous support means all the difference. Visit [habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org) to donate, join our advocacy efforts and find ways to volunteer today!

Thanks to these generous partners who help build Habitat houses through their in-kind donations!



Learn more about this crucial support that furthers Habitat's efforts and view our video celebrating what it takes to build a Habitat house at [habitat.org/support/gifts-in-kind](https://www.habitat.org/support/gifts-in-kind).



Why we serve



“Service is the rent we pay for being.”
MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Who is our neighbor?

Who do we — as members of our local communities, as part of the human family, as supporters of a nonprofit organization that works to create a world where everyone has a decent place to live — consider to be the neighbors who Christ so clearly instructed us to love as we love ourselves?

The answer is literally all around us, and to love those neighbors is to serve those neighbors. To strengthen ties, to offer a hand up, to build.

Each year, 1.8 million Habitat volunteers — and countless others who believe everyone should have a decent place to live — do just that, and the ripple effects of that generosity and hard work help more families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives. Hear from just a few who share what motivates them to help their neighbors.



“Inspired to be of help to others”



Q: We often talk about the benefits of service to strengthening and improving the community at large. But with Habitat, we also often hear the individuals who serve share how their actions help them strengthen and improve their own lives. What do you as an individual like best about service, and why do you think it should be an important part of everyone’s life?

A: A Habitat project in a deprived community inspires other property owners in the area to improve other homes and the general environment in the larger neighborhood. Dwellers there get the Habitat spirit of volunteering and helping each other. The Habitat homeowner’s family members participate in work on their own homes and are then inspired to help others. Perhaps the most significant after-effect is on the Habitat volunteers who join us in building projects, who almost unanimously agree that the personal benefits to their lives always exceed their own financial contributions, time and effort — and that this incentive lasts for years in the future, or for a lifetime.

Your own service has taken many forms – your time in the Navy, your tenure in public office, your work with Habitat and The Carter Center, your regular presence as a Sunday school teacher. What do all of these kinds of service have in common for you?

Like other Habitat volunteers, I have learned that our greatest blessings come when we are able to improve the lives of others, and this is especially true when those others are desperately poor or in need.





So many people look to you as a model of public service and servant leadership. Tell us where this impulse to serve first originated. Who (or what) inspires you?

My earliest and most basic service inspirations have come from my Christian faith, encouraged by others who have been dedicated to serving others and learning to treat those who are served with mutual respect as equals.

Historically, we as a nation have invested in the concept of service. Why do you think public recognition of and support for service is so vital?

America is the most diverse or heterogeneous nation, comprised primarily by immigrants who were not afraid of an unpredictable future in a strange land. Almost all of them had great need when they arrived here and were then inspired to be of help to others. This concept of service to others is still a crucial element in the American character and has always prevailed in overcoming challenges and correcting societal mistakes.

What would you say to the next generation to help encourage them to serve? How does service impact our collective future?

“Enjoy your American freedom, and utilize it to expand your own opportunities and God-given talents as much as possible. You will find that these investments in helping others will always pay rich dividends.”

**FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER,
A HABITAT VOLUNTEER SINCE 1984**

Service to others is still a crucial element in the American character and has always prevailed in overcoming challenges and correcting societal mistakes.

JIMMY CARTER





“Service brings us together”

Q: How long has service been a part of your life?

A: My parents didn’t make a big deal about volunteering or donating or service — it was just part of who we were as a family. When I was in middle school, I went to Sunday school class, and there was a young girl about my age. The teachers introduced her as the daughter of the Habitat homeowner partnering with our church. She didn’t say much but shared that her family had come from Cambodia. She showed us a picture that her younger brother had drawn of her family in front of their new Habitat home. They were stick figures, and their heads had these ginormous smiles. There was a little house in the background.

I grew up in a working class community and had not really thought about the fact that there might be kids who didn’t have homes. I started volunteering with my youth group in high school, going to hurricane-hit areas in South Carolina and to the Appalachia region in West Virginia. I’ll never forget swinging a sledgehammer, which is the coolest thing as a teenager. Being exposed to people who were in very different circumstances felt important, felt like something that I should do.

As a grown-up, you have worked for nonprofits focused on eliminating hunger and teen pregnancy. Through Habitat, you have helped make homeownership a reality for many families. What does this life of service do for you?

It is pretty simple — I get to be a part of something that is much bigger than myself.

I will probably never see a day where every human being has a place to call home. Yet I know that I am part of the critical building blocks to getting to that day. Being part of a movement is transformational for me and for everyone who gets to be involved in it. I often tell our volunteers, “At Habitat, we get to be around the best of humanity.” I feel very lucky that I get to be in that space every day.

I also hold as a core fundamental value that no one, from the poorest to the richest, is successful without the help and support of others. There are just different ways that happens. And growing into our full potential is our ultimate goal as individuals. Being a part of helping others helps me to do that.

Connections between people are what make us human. Service bridges ideological differences, theological differences, economic differences. It focuses on our common humanity.

HEATHER LAFFERTY





Do you ever get discouraged?

I go back to a great Millard Fuller quote: “We have the know-how in the world to house everyone. We have the resources in the world to house everyone. All that’s missing is the will to do it.”

I have had the ability to see a lot of different social issues and understand the complexities of them. What I have found is that if we don’t solve housing, we will never solve other social issues. Having that will is often missing and that can be discouraging. But moments of feeling down are lifted pretty quickly.

It’s hard not to be inspired by Habitat volunteers who say, “I have no idea how to build a house, but I will certainly try.” Or “I have never raised money before, but I am willing to ask.” Or “I don’t know exactly how I am going to pay for my kids’ college, but I will write you a check.” Focusing on what people are willing to do keeps me from getting too overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges that we face. I think that there is an underlying goodness in people that is reflected in service.

Why do you think young people should be involved in service?

I have two little kids, and I think a lot about the younger generation. I look at technology and all of the things we rely on today that are either pulling us apart or isolating us. Connections between people are what make us human. Service brings us together. It bridges ideological differences, theological differences, economic differences. It focuses on our common humanity.

I think about that young Cambodian girl who came into my Sunday school class to share her story and her little brother’s picture. She helped me understand that we are all in this together. I can’t imagine my life without service.

**HEATHER LAFFERTY, CEO AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY METRO DENVER SINCE 2008**





“We are all in this together”

Inspired by my involvement in my college’s alternative break program and Habitat’s Collegiate Challenge volunteer trips, I decided to move home after graduating to dedicate a year of service.

My year with the Hartford Area Habitat was a transformational experience full of personal growth and development. Serving as an AmeriCorps member with Habitat changed my entire perspective of service. It enhanced my sense of civic responsibility and allowed me to build competencies basic to democracy, the most important of which was working amongst diversity.

AmeriCorps allowed me to work with those who had different perspectives to address a common problem: eradicating substandard housing. It brought me from viewing community service as charity to viewing community service as true solidarity. The significance of Habitat’s mission — “to bring people together to build homes, communities and hope” — is that it implies people work alongside each other. This lens of engagement was my introduction to community-based work through a social justice-oriented paradigm.

Currently, I serve as the associate director of the College of Charleston’s Center for Civic Engagement where I oversee the college’s community service programs — programs much like the ones that got me involved with Habitat when I was in college.

Through the work that I do in the center, I share with my students the lessons that I learned from my time as an AmeriCorps member working with Habitat for Humanity. I highlight the importance of serving *with* rather than *for* others. I try to teach my students that we are all in this together with something to bring and something to learn.

In February, when I heard that the current administration proposed to cut funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service, I was speechless. Now, more than ever, we need AmeriCorps.

According to the 2012 report “A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy’s Future,” U.S. civic health is on a decline. The report provided 10 indicators of anemic U.S. civic health to illustrate the severity of the problem. Two of those indicators follow. The U.S. ranked 139th in voter participation of 172 world democracies. In 2009 and 2010, only 10 percent of U.S. citizens contacted a public official.

Although those indicators are alarming, the report indicated that civic learning could be gained through community service. As such, we need AmeriCorps. We need programs that build bridges and bring people together.





Australian activist and educator Lilla Watson said, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

When service is viewed as charity, it creates a hierarchy that places the volunteer in a position where they might blame those they are serving as having deficits, thus reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices. But when service is viewed as true solidarity, volunteers are less likely to blame those they are serving for their woes — and more likely to see that the deficits exist within social systems, not the individuals they are serving.

CHRISTOPHER CIARCIA, HABITAT AMERICORPS 2012-2013 AND ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON'S CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



“Doing what I can to address the needs of others”

Serving others is something that I have always tried to prioritize through my employment opportunities, whether that's working as a barista or as a city parks steward.

Building homes as an AmeriCorps member with Habitat for Humanity Seattle-King County was the epitome of what I envision as service-oriented work. As a construction volunteer lead, I was part of a team that completed four home renovations in 10 months.

With a background in architecture, I figured a year working with Habitat would give me great hands-on experience to build my professional resume. However, I realized throughout my AmeriCorps term that it's important for me to be serving people in a more direct way.

One of the home renovations I worked on was known as the Delta Build, part of Delta's nationwide support of Habitat. I never imagined that the people I met during this six-week build would change the course of my career path. At the close of my AmeriCorps term, I was lucky to have support from many of those Delta volunteers during the rigorous application and training process to become a flight attendant.

I have been working as a flight attendant with Delta for one year. Similar to nonprofit work, in my job I wear many hats. Whether that's assisting a passenger with physical limitations, speaking Spanish to help someone find their connecting flight, comforting a nervous flier or celebrating an anniversary, my job is all about the people.

To me, service means doing what I can to address the needs of others. Service means utilizing my strengths in a way that can improve someone's day — and even their future.

**KELSEY REINKE,
HABITAT
AMERICORPS
2013-2014 AND
DELTA FLIGHT
ATTENDANT**





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“An advocate for causes I believe in”

I grew up in Tondo, known as one of the densest residential areas in Manila, the Philippines. To most Filipinos, it carries a reputation for being a downtrodden area. This triggered me to pursue working on housing, to change my community.

As an architecture student, my undergraduate thesis was about the root cause of housing problems in the Philippines. I also started engaging with different institutions involved with housing and exploring strategies to address these problems.

I see myself helping and supporting Habitat projects in any way I can. I have already started by attending Habitat Asia-Pacific’s Young Leaders Forum, where I’ve learned how to be an advocate for causes that I believe in. In the future, I – and my fellow youth volunteers – can also help build Habitat houses and communities and act as fundraisers to help more families build or repair their houses.

As I transition from being a student to a young professional, I believe that true development must start from the smallest unit of society. Good intentions are not enough. To help solve housing issues, we youth must do our research.

We must be advocates of participatory designing, planning and building. We must be involved with institutions that provide technical expertise and have community involvement. And we must realize that attaining our hopes for quality education, healthy environment, gender equality and decent employment begins when families live in decent, sustainable homes.

ABIGAIL CAMILLE MANALO, LICENSED ARCHITECT AND HABITAT VOLUNTEER SINCE 2014

Good intentions are not enough. We must realize that quality education, environment, equality and employment begin when families live in decent, sustainable homes.

ABIGAIL CAMILLE MANALO



“This is what I am supposed to be doing”



I struggle to explain why I volunteer for Habitat. Most of our “regular” construction volunteers have retired from successful careers. Such is not the case with me — and thus, I suppose, the frequent “why” question.

Why on Earth would someone step back from “working” to give away their time? My choice to do so has baffled loved ones who witnessed for years how hard I worked to earn my doctoral degree in psychology.

I have always felt very clear within myself that this is what I am supposed to be doing. As each attempt to explain myself fell short, I eventually resorted to responding, “It doesn’t so much feel like a choice as it does a calling.” I do believe that God has called me to this work, though I have no tangible proof of this, nothing in writing and certainly no formal job offer.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” What I’ve done by volunteering with Habitat is to step in faith. I don’t know where it will lead, but I trust in the journey.

To outside observers, it appears that I am spending my time building houses, which is not what I have been educated to do. In my mind, however, I have not walked away from my psychology profession. Every time I listen to volunteers tell their stories or help

instruct, encourage and support them as they struggle with a task, I am working as a psychologist. Each time I empower hesitant volunteers to face their fears, step out of their comfort zones and try something new, I am honoring my education and training. Every time I greet someone with a smile or a hug and let them know they matter, I am attempting to improve the human condition — a goal we, as psychologists, strive to achieve. It is through the activity of building houses that I am able to help build up people.

So why do I volunteer? I volunteer because I can, because God granted me the desire, strength, knowledge, resources and opportunity to do so. I volunteer for those whose circumstances don't allow them to. I volunteer in the hope that it will inspire others to do the same. I volunteer because it fills a space in my life that money, possessions, titles and awards have never been able to do. I volunteer because each day on this Earth is a gift, and the least I can do is to give back in return.

Why Habitat? Because I know firsthand how important it is to have a place to call home. As a result of growing up in a neighborhood where I felt safe, I was free to roam with the careless abandon and idealistic sense of possibility that only a young child can possess. This freedom allowed me to learn, to dream, to hope and to visualize a positive future.

I plan to return to my career in psychology, perhaps teaching or working in schools. Volunteering for Habitat has helped me crystallize my life path. I am now more inspired than ever to ensure that working to improve the lives of others is always at the forefront of my occupational goals.

What's in it for me? I love the physical exercise of hammering, sawing, climbing ladders, hoisting lumber and digging holes in the dirt. I enjoy the intellectual work of calculating measurements and figuring out how to bring the architect's plans to life. I cherish the camaraderie that develops among people who labor toward common goals in challenging circumstances. Most of all, what I gain from volunteering is a sense of purpose. Each time my car pulls up to the build site, I am filled with joy at the prospect of being able to make a difference — to matter to someone who matters to me.

DONNA RICCA, A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND MORRIS HABITAT VOLUNTEER IN NEW JERSEY SINCE 2011



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DONNA RICCA



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