



HELPING FAMILIES

IMPROVING NEIGHBORHOODS

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Toward greater impact

LaCasa finalized a 5-year strategic plan in May 2017 after more than 18 months of gathering input and giving careful thought to our role in improving lives in Elkhart County. The plan is exciting and ambitious, presenting opportunity for greater impact and more changed lives. In this newsletter, we are featuring successes from our Financial Empowerment Center, our quality rentals, and our neighborhood revitalization work. These are pillars of LaCasa's impact to date and all have plans for expansion going forward. The historic, current and future life-changing impact is a result of your partnership. When people unite with a shared mission, truly amazing things happen. Who knows what we can accomplish going forward?

True Grit

Taylor Fields had serious obstacles between her and her dream of home ownership, but she didn't back down. "My first time applying for a DreamSavers matched savings account, back in 2014, I got turned down. That was very discouraging, not getting in. I went home and cried. But that motivated me to fix what I needed to fix to be accepted into the program. It took me one year to get in."

Taylor
with her
children

The DreamSavers program offers a match on a person's saved earned income that can be used on a first-time home purchase, post-secondary education, small business, or home repair. While they save, they attend trainings and receive on-on-one coaching. The program offers a hand up to hard working adults like Taylor.

Once she got in, she made the most of it. Referring to coaching, she said, "It was really helpful, focusing on me and my issues. I really liked that part." She attained her goal of home ownership in August. "I don't know if I could have achieved this goal of homeownership without LaCasa. This program really helped me out."

DreamSavers is part of LaCasa's Financial Empowerment Center that helps more than 500 people achieve their financial goals every year. The strategic plan outlines initiatives to significantly increase the impact through innovative partnerships with employers that offer access to low-cost emergency loans and facilitate participation in our services. We project that 30,000 workers will have access to these opportunities by 2021.



A Breath of Fresh Air



On Tuesday, June 27, 2017, LaCasa sponsored a trip which took residents from Water Tower Place apartments to the beautiful Wellfield Botanic Gardens in downtown Elkhart. Water Tower Place is designed

for residents age 55 and older. The trip was arranged by Resident Services Manager Pam McGregor to provide an opportunity for our senior residents to get out and fellowship with one another.

The excursion started with a bus ride sponsored by the Tolson Center in Elkhart. Upon arriving, the group gathered together in the brightly blooming gardens to enjoy sack lunches. After eating, those who were able explored the gardens, and did some sight-seeing and walking. Others sat together and enjoyed the fresh air and pleasant surroundings.

One of the residents, who doesn't normally talk or walk, did on that day! This was very moving, as the other residents applauded her. She said she had a great time.

Pam told us, "Things like this add to the quality of our residents' lives and they are truly grateful!"

LaCasa currently provides excellent property management and support services for 325 households. Our strategic plan states a goal to expand this to 700 by 2021, more than doubling the number of people benefiting from the better quality of life, experience of dignity, and feeling of empowerment that living in a LaCasa property promotes.

Osée Tshiwape

Osée Tshiwape came to the United States from Congo six years ago. He was one of the lucky 50,000 recipients of the "Diversity Visa Lottery" that year, a State Department program that allows access to a green card for immigrants of certain countries.

Now, as of August, Osée is a home owner.

After hearing about LaCasa's services from a friend, he went online and started the enrollment process for the program. Joel Zwier and Jessica George made a big impact on Osée. "I really liked the Money for Life classes. The main lesson I learned was: 'Don't spend money on things you want, but ask the question 'Do I really need it?' Before, many times I bought stuff I really didn't need. Asking this question really helped me save more money over time."

"I don't believe I would have achieved my goal of homeownership without LaCasa. Knowing my savings was being matched motivated me to push on to my goal."



Miguel Angel Amador Corona

Miguel Angel became a first-time home owner in September. "The home buyer class impacted me the most. I actually had to take it twice and I learned as much the second time as the first!"

Miguel Angel was most challenged by staying on task with his savings goal; setting aside extra for the new home. Both he and his wife were used to eating out almost daily and buying things they didn't really need. "We learned to funnel these monies into the IDA account as well as into

personal savings." They like having an emergency savings account. He said, "Knowing you can fall back on this in hard times is a really nice feeling."

He is not sure he would have had the discipline to reach his homeownership goal all on his own. He said, "I really appreciated the monthly reminders when I successfully made my deposits. I also knew if for some reason I missed a month that LaCasa staff would call or text to find out why. They really had my back!"



County-Wide Access

Larry Gautsche, President/CEO

LaCasa's Board and staff are committed to improving access to LaCasa services for all Elkhart County residents and neighborhoods. As we work at telling our story, we find that old perceptions remain and are hard to change. To some, LaCasa, Inc. is still seen as a "Goshen based" organization or as focusing our services for the Latino population at the exclusion of other groups. LaCasa's housing development/neighborhood revitalization work is visible to the public, but has been limited to Goshen and Elkhart. Financial education and counseling services, which are more equally dispersed throughout the county, are less visible.

To better understand how the LaCasa brand is perceived by the community and whether a name change could improve the brand, we recently surveyed supporters, general population and former clients. The number of persons who took the time to not only respond, but add thoughtful comments (225 general respondents and 205 former clients), was very encouraging. It was obvious that many persons identify closely with the LaCasa mission. Over 60% of respondents in all groups felt that LaCasa, Inc. was the right name for the organization going forward. 80% of respondents felt that the name was either an asset

or a neutral influence in advancing the organization. We've decided to keep our name and build on our strong support base and history.

What you will see going forward is a more focused approach to connecting with communities outside of Goshen. We'll continue valuing local government partnerships while also emphasizing partnerships with area businesses that bring new financial resources to their employees. LaCasa's Financial Empowerment Center is piloting a financial educational program with Fairmont Homes, taking education to the work site. We are also piloting an employee loan program with four area employers to provide employees with an alternative to abusive payday loans. We hope to make this loan program and corresponding free financial education available to other Elkhart County employers in 2018.

Through these new partnership initiatives, a larger investment in marketing, and your assistance in sharing the LaCasa story, we hope to eliminate perceived barriers to service and make LaCasa resources more accessible to all of Elkhart County.

With a Little Help from Our Friends

418 S 7th St, the second of 5 projects in the East Lincoln Crossroads Revitalization, is making progress. Help from the community is a big reason why.

The property is a great example of LaCasa's revitalization work that so many people in Goshen appreciate. LaCasa has impacted more than 540 Goshen properties through its Help-a-Housesm program and other revitalization initiatives. In every case, partnerships with community businesses, churches, service groups, and individuals have been key to both the funding and, through volunteering, the actual work.

Groups from 1st Source Bank, Lippert, Dauby O'Connor & Zaleski, Goshen College's Community Engagement Day, and the Goshen College cross country team have done a lot of demolition at 418 that is setting the stage for the more technical work to follow.

Our strategic plan states a goal to broaden our impact with neighborhood revitalization work by completing

volunteer projects in all Elkhart County communities by 2021 and by making Community Building & Engagement services available to neighborhoods throughout the county.



LaCasa currently has a full production pipeline and volunteers are needed as we seek to complete the East Lincoln Crossroads properties at a time when many contractors are very busy. Several people volunteer regularly and we would love to add to this group. Volunteering is both fun and fulfilling. If you can pitch in, a great way to get started is by texting IVOL to 51555. You'll get a link to a quick form and we'll follow up with you. Alternately, you can contact Kate Irelan at 574-533-4450 x17.

Partnering to Change Lives

As hard to believe as it is, we are approaching the holiday season. It's a time when a lot of us take time to appreciate our many blessings and think about how we can give from our abundance.

At LaCasa, we're aware that it's easier to talk about greater impact than it is to accomplish it. We can only get as far as our community partnerships take us. Support takes various forms. We mentioned our need for volunteers. We also value participation on our board, in committee work and in advisory capacities. We always benefit from ambassadors who will spread the word and raise funds for LaCasa. We'll happily work with you to equip you to do this. Contact Chris at 574-533-4450 x16 or chris.kingsley@lacasainc.net to get more involved.

Monetary and in-kind gifts have become more critical as the external funding environment continues to change. Our



East Lincoln Crossroads Revitalization project

strategic plan recognizes a need for a broad and engaged base of stakeholders. Thank you for considering a year-end gift to LaCasa. If you have not given before, we ask you to take the step of making a gift. If you already give, will you consider increasing your gift? Whatever you do, know that we are committed to faithfully deploying your investments to empower individuals, stabilize families, and revitalize neighborhoods.

Donations from people like you are the lifeblood of this inspirational work. Thank you for considering making an online donation at www.lacasainc.net or sending a check to LaCasa, Inc. at 202 N Cottage Ave, Goshen, IN 46528. Please always feel free to email or call Chris Kingsley at chris.kingsley@lacasainc.net or 574-533-4450 x16 to have a conversation about how LaCasa uses donations and works with donors. Philanthropy should be a fulfilling and joyful experience. Let's work together to make that happen!

All LaCasa activities and services are provided without regard to race, age, gender, disability, national origin, ancestry, or status as a veteran.

LaCasa, Inc. is a Community Development Organization serving Elkhart County. Our programs are open to all people regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, or religion. LaCasa's programs are designed to improve neighborhoods and strengthen families.



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