

Housing Rental Assistance Program Continued...

compliance with Housing Quality Standards (HQS) established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Each home is inspected prior to occupancy and annually by a qualified HQS inspector, and must comply with both the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act and Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act of 1992. Rental rates charged must be reasonable, and comparable to similar units within the service area. In addition, prospective homes must not exceed HUD's Fair Market Rents.

"When you live in a safe, well-maintained home, you generally feel better about yourself as a person," said Garcia. "We want our residents in the program to feel valued because it's a critical part of working toward independence and stability. For us, it's really about the person we're serving. They're not just a name on a piece of paper."



PO Box 685065
Austin, Texas 78768

DONATE ONLINE www.GreenDoors.org

OUR WISH LIST

Green Doors accepts both financial and product contributions that directly benefit our residents. If you wish to contribute items listed below, please contact us for delivery arrangements.

Our Food Pantry is always in need of:

- Canned meats (tuna, chicken, ham, etc.)
- Condiments (ketchup, mustard, grape jelly, etc.)
- Oil (olive or vegetable)
- Salt and pepper or sugar and sweetener
- Protein drinks like Ensure

Our Houses are always in need of:

- USB sticks
- Sets of dishes or pots and pans • Movies on DVD
- Games (e.g. chess board)

To make a donation for Green Doors programs, contact Allison Scharf at (512) 469-9130 or ascharf@greendoors.org.

Financial donations can be made via our website at www.greendoors.org or mailed to:

PO Box 685065, Austin, TX 78768

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THE COMMUNITY VOICE

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On the comeback trail

For Erin Pederson, it's the little things in life she's learned to appreciate, such as the peaceful satisfaction of turning off the television and reading to her two children, ages two and five.

Less than two years ago, however, Pederson had trouble finding any peace whatsoever. Already struggling with alcohol addiction and a physically abusive husband, it was a knock on her door by Child Protective Services demanding her infant daughter that ultimately put her on the path to rebuilding her life.

"I woke up the next day on October 12th and I didn't have either of my kids and a violent husband who was angrier than I'd ever seen," she said, noting that her mother had custody of her son at the time too. "(My husband) blamed me, his family blamed me, everyone blamed me."

With her life falling apart, Pederson saw the need to make drastic changes. One day, with her husband out on a drinking binge, she ran to her neighbors to call her case worker, asking to be taken to a women's shelter. That same day, she left her home, her abusive husband and her old life with nothing more than the clothes she wore and a pair of flip-flops on her feet.

RESIDENT SUCCESS STORY

"Material things didn't matter to me," Pederson said. "Safety and survival was all that mattered. It was a very primal feeling."

Pederson found herself at a SafePlace shelter, where she stayed for two months and received counseling to deal with the trauma of her abusive relationship, the loss of her children, and her own personal demons.

"There is a lot of damage control done to drown out that voice, the other person's voice," said Pederson. "It's a continuing loop of defeating phrases. A lot of work went into rebuilding my self-esteem and self-worth."

Pederson also began to take the necessary steps to regain custody of her children. Within a week of her arrival at SafePlace, she began taking courses in parenting at Austin Recovery and received substance abuse counseling through Alcoholics Anonymous, as mandated by CPS. Pederson also found her spirituality.

"I was placed in such a desperate situation that there was no one else to turn to but God," she said. "I prayed for guidance, I prayed for direction ... I knew I was worth more than the situation I put myself in."



Soon after, Pederson's luck starting taking a turn for the better. After filling out numerous housing applications, she received a phone call from Green Doors Senior Community Manager Andrea Garcia to schedule a preliminary interview. Knowing she'd need a job to gain housing support through Green Doors, she called a local Callahan's General Store inquiring about employment opportunities. As luck would have it, a position opened up the same day. Following a short phone interview, Pederson had the job she needed, as well as housing through Green Doors.

The icing on the cake came in August of 2010 for Pederson. After completing her courses and counseling through Austin Recovery, Pederson gained back the most precious parts of her life - her two children.

"It was the best feeling in the world," said Pederson, who is currently taking Paralegal Studies courses at Austin Community College. "I earned these children back."

"From day one, Erin was determined to change her life," Garcia added. "You could see it in her eyes. She was completely focused on turning things around, getting her kids back and being a good mom. She has a lot to be proud of now."

Although things aren't always easy, Pederson readily accepts life's challenges. Pederson stays sober and on track because of what she calls "the gift of desperation." The desperation that led her to leave her old life is the same desperation that keeps her going in the right direction now.

"I had to believe in me, that I was worth all the hard work," said Pederson. "I deserve a good life."

You can help residents like Erin continue on their path towards self-sufficiency by investing your time or financial resources in Green Doors' mission. Visit www.greendoors.org or look inside to find out more!

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Green Doors Difference

How do we know if we make a difference? Is it about how many homes Green Doors owns and operates for people in need? Is it whether we have an operating surplus at the end of the year? Is it about the quality and duration of supportive services we provide our residents?

My answer is yes to all of these questions.

Yet, those measures don't tell the full story. They fail to tell you meaningfully about Green Doors' impact at the person level. How does the work we do help transform a life?

It starts with a home. Most residents, prior to joining us, did not have a home. They lived on the streets, in hidden encampments spread throughout Austin, under a bridge. If they were lucky, they may have lived for a few days at the downtown shelter, on a friend's couch, or at a rent-by-the-week motel. This precarious, day-to-day life is awful. Many do not feel safe. They worry that someone will mug them, take all their stuff, or that their abuser will find them and do much worse. Many have trouble securing a job because they don't have a home address to put down on a job application, or have access to a shower so that they can be presentable for interviews and work. And, many are forced to keep moving or hiding because to do otherwise means that they may get arrested by the police. They simply cannot rest they cannot be.

Green Doors' first step – **providing an individual or family with a safe, affordable quality home** – is the foundation for our residents' transformation. It means that Douglas, a veteran who has lost his sight, now has a fully accessible home that enables him to be self-sufficient and start working on his bachelor's degree after living in the woods by himself for years. It means that Jimmy, the son of a physically disabled mom who was living in a car and homeless shelter, and who had to switch schools every other month, now has his own bedroom in his own home where he can do his homework. He can feel safe and secure that he doesn't have to move on a moment's notice and that he can make friends he knows he'll see again.

Green Doors' second step – **connecting our residents to the services they need and believing in them as their own agents for positive change in their lives** – allows our residents to reclaim their lives. It allowed Vicky, who was addicted to crack and living on the street, to finally overcome her drug addiction and get a job helping others who were in her same situation. It allowed Jim, who had struggled with mental health challenges for years, to get stable and discover a passion for community gardening, allowing him to help feed his fellow residents and provide vegetables to our weekly food pantry.

Green Doors' Texas Two-Step of housing and services is powerful. Its potency lies in linking the tools needed – i.e., housing and services – with a person's desire for change and willingness to take ownership of his/her life. This is where true meaningful transformation occurs...



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GREEN DOORS VISION & MISSION

Our Vision: Green Doors' vision is that one day, all Central Texas families and individuals will have the opportunity to live in affordable, safe, quality housing.

Our Mission: Green Doors' mission is to prevent and help end homelessness and poverty housing for those working to achieve independent living in Central Texas.

Feedback: To be added or removed from our mailing list, or to update your contact information, please contact Allison at 512.469.9130 or email her at ascharf@greendoors.org



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS: C3 Presents volunteers pitch in to beautify Pecan Springs Commons

When C3 Presents employees aren't busy producing live music events or working with up-and-coming artists, they're busy volunteering and making a difference in the Austin community. That was certainly the case in December, when a group of C3 Presents volunteers got to work beautifying Pecan Springs Commons. C3 Presents is an Austin-based event planning and production company known for producing the Austin City Limits Music Festival and the Lollapalooza tour, among others.

All told, 20 C3 Presents volunteers rolled up their sleeves and went to work revitalizing areas within the 70-unit affordable housing community. Work included landscaping, building bookcases, creating pathways with crushed granite, preparing community garden beds, preparing a unit for a new resident, and tearing down a chain link fence.

"The C3 Presents volunteers were great," says Avalon Rehn, Green Doors Volunteer Coordinator. "They were enthusiastic, hardworking, and took a lot of pride in their work at Pecan Springs Commons. Volunteer efforts like theirs make a tremendous difference for our residents and the neighborhood."

Interested in volunteering? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Avalon Rehn at (512) 469-9130 or email her at arehn@greendoors.org

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: The Housing Rental Assistance Program

Military veterans and persons with disabilities transitioning out of homelessness have a new way to receive the housing assistance they need.

Green Doors' Housing Rental Assistance Program, which began in January of 2010, supports the organization's transitional housing services, serving those enrolled in the Persons with Disabilities Rental Assistance Program (PWDRA) and Veterans Rental Assistance Program (VRA) in Travis, Williamson and Burnet Counties. All told, Green Doors currently serves 61 individuals through this program.

"We're fortunate to see what a significant impact this program has on the residents," said Green Doors Housing Specialist Cliff Chong. "We believe this program will continue to help veterans and disabled persons in need transition to independent living."

In the past year, the Housing Rental Assistance Program has proven to be a welcome and needed addition to Green Doors' housing continuum. Funded primarily by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Texas Veterans Commission, this program differs from Green Doors' other housing programs.

Persons with disabilities enrolled in this program are limited to a 24-month stay (veterans enrolled have a 36-month stay), as they work toward gaining housing stability and financial independence. This is done with the help of a case manager, who meets with residents on a monthly basis in their homes to set personal goals that lead to independent living, and to help establish a monthly budget. Green Doors also ensures enrolled residents with access to additional supportive services, including educational services, job search assistance, financial planning assistance and nutritional assistance through our weekly food pantry, among others.

Perhaps most significantly, the Housing Rental Assistance Program is unique in that it provides each qualified resident with choice. Residents can choose their housing within the three counties served by the program and often need the flexibility of choice. Whether it's



proximity to work, school, family, or any number of other reasons, each resident in the program is given this choice as another step toward independent living, while fostering both individual dignity and respect. Green Doors then works with each landlord to subsidize rent, while also providing security deposit and utility deposit assistance. Each household in the program commits no more than 30 percent of their adjusted gross monthly income toward rent.

"I have a client whose children had to travel quite a distance by bus to get to school every day," said Andrea Garcia, Green Doors' Senior Community Manager. "Through the Housing Rental Assistance Program, she was able to relocate much closer the school, allowing her children to spend more quality time with their mother."

So that residents receive the quality housing they need and deserve, Green Doors ensures that each residence is in

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