



DOORWAY

Volume 6
Issue 1

BCHT: Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc.
(Formerly Martin House)

August 2018

BCHT is a doorway to hope and opportunity, whose mission is to create safe, quality housing in Trenton that local people can afford to buy or rent and to support community action and development in at-risk urban neighborhoods.

Santander Helps Us Provide Shelter, Hope, and a Leg Up

A \$20,000 grant from the Santander Foundation was instrumental in the rehab of the property at 9 Thompson Street, Trenton. The house was abandoned for six years after the owner passed away. It has three bedrooms and 1.5 baths and has become the home for a new family, whose hopes and dreams for the future can now be more easily attained by having the stability and confidence gained from owning a home.



Kitchen Before Rehab – Sad and Empty

The new homeowner works in construction and lives in the house with his mother and niece.

He says they are all grateful to have their own home where they can settle down and get on with their lives.

He will be doing sweat equity by completing some finish work on the house and arranging a neighborhood cleanup.



Kitchen After Rehab – Bright and New

BCHT is thankful to be able to continue to provide hope and a stable living space to aspiring families by completing the rehab of 9 Thompson Street and making it available to a deserving family for only \$25,000!

THANK YOU to You, Our Donors, and Santander for Helping Us Continue to Fulfill Our Mission!

BCHT Thrift Store News – A New Look

Our Thrift Store at 802 East State Street has a new look. New floors and a fresh coat of paint set the stage for a revamp of the layout and types of displays in the store.

The store provides clothing, shoes, and household items, as well as furniture and appliances in our nearby warehouse at 10 Ward Avenue. Bags of clothing are sold for \$8.00, or free to qualified people.

The Thrift Store is run entirely by volunteers, headed by Gloria Philips in the store and Vera Werts in the warehouse. Many other volunteers give their time to sort and display clothes, pick up donated furniture, and cover the store during the hours when it is open (Fridays 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm and Saturdays 9:00 am to 3:00 pm).

The volunteers have also run a Christmas giving program for over 20 years that provides gifts for 1200 local needy children, as well as meal baskets at Thanksgiving for 300 families.



Newly Renovated Thrift Store

The truck used for furniture pick-ups needs to be replaced. Can you help?

Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc. (BCHT) www.BCHTrenton.org 609-989-0271 BCHTinfo@gmail.com
Executive Director: Pearleen Waters; **Board of Trustees:** Dorothy Holmes, President; Jacqueline Meyers, Secretary; Kellie Malloy Foerter; Christopher Mazauskas; John Sterbinsky; Tamika Young, LSW; Bruce M. Sattin, Esq.; **Founder:** Fr. Brian McCormick; **Editor:** Linda Smythe Oliaro

“Truly Affordable” Housing is Elusive

By Linda Smythe Oliaro, Editor and Member BCHT Advisory Board

Stable Housing Key to Productive Families and Self-Fulfillment

Seeing a new family move into one of our rehabbed homes is always a thrill. It makes us realize how much we often take for granted concerning our own living conditions.

Fear of eviction and homelessness is very de-stabilizing to a family. Much of a low-income family’s energy can be spent worrying about housing and actually moving from place to place as they are continually made to move on to another apartment, or worse yet, a shelter.



Linda Smythe Oliaro

Living in a reliable home that is truly affordable gives a large measure of stability and confidence. We all know that housing in New Jersey is expensive. In Trenton the average monthly rental is about \$1,000 a month for two bedrooms. A family of three or four that takes home \$20,000 a year can hardly afford to spend \$12,000 a year for housing.

The homes we build and rehab are *truly* affordable to low-income families, as we sell them for less than \$30,000, at no interest. This is much lower than the \$90,000+ charged for most “low-income” houses. It is our mission to provide truly affordable housing to as many deserving, hard-working low income families as we can.

So many of our homeowners have told us that having stable, reliable shelter gives them the freedom to better their lives, to pursue further education for themselves and their children, as well as contributing to the community in which they live. One of our homeowners told us, “Owning my own home has given me the stability, peace of mind, and confidence I needed to earn a Bachelors and a Masters degree in Information Technology and to pursue a good career.” We think this is a wonderful endorsement and hope you do, too!

BCHT homeowners and other neighbors come together every other month (January, March, May, July, September, November) for a community meeting to share information and plan events.

Next BCHT Community Meeting: Wednesday, September 19 at 6:30 pm at 802 East State Street. Please come!

Skylar Project Update

We thank all of you who responded to our plea to help the Skylar family get back into their house after the insurance company refused to pay for all the damages caused by a car hitting the house, moving it off the foundation, and causing flooding by breaking the water main. Unfortunately, it turns out that, even with all our efforts, the Skylars lost their home to foreclosure. “Skylar” was a code name for this family, which we would like to continue to use for another family suffering an insurance issue:

Last December the new “Skylar” family had a pipe that froze and burst, causing major damage to the first and second floors, as well as flooding the basement. It is now August, and the insurance company is still “reviewing” the case. Three generations of Trentonians have called this place home for 20 years, proudly paying off the mortgage last year. BCHT has stepped in to get the family back into their home. Besides your donations we have found generous contractors and tradesmen who have discounted their time and supplies. So far all the wallboard has been replaced and is ready for trim and painting. We will be installing new flooring and carpeting, as well as gently used appliances and kitchen cabinets. Thank you to all who have contributed to get the “Skylars” back into their home.

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PURCHASE GOES TO BCHT
SHOP AT VIRGINIAS-DAUGHTER.COM**

In the Spotlight – Courage and Determination Reap Many Blessings



Eliza Peal (2nd from left) and Family

In December 2013 we told you about an amazing woman named Eliza (Liz) Peal, who has endured more than most of us can even imagine. Liz escaped from Liberia during the civil war in 1990 that killed over 200,000 people. She was a college student working in Monrovia when the rebels entered the city. She was separated from her twin sons and walked for weeks with thousands of others trying to reach the safety of Sierra Leone. During her flight she endured many terrors, including being captured and kept as a slave before escaping again, and then nearly drowning as her boat capsized crossing the river into Sierra Leone. She lived in Sierra Leone for a year in a refugee camp before the Red Cross got clearance for her to come to the US.

Liz arrived in the US in November 1990 with only a summer dress and flip-flops. The Red Cross helped her find a job and an apartment for six months, then she was on her own. She worked two jobs and checked monthly with the Red Cross to see if they had located her children, parents, or siblings, but there was no word.

When she moved to Trenton, Liz met Mamadou Keita, an immigrant from Mali, who would become her husband. Together they had three children, Diamond, Muhammad, and Ayssatu. While continuing to work two jobs, Liz got a scholarship to Mercer County College. But the events of September 11 changed everything. New immigration rules sent her husband back to Mali. Liz realized she couldn't give her children a good life here if she didn't have an education, so she and Mamadou decided that he would take the children to Africa with him while Liz worked here to complete her education and save money to bring them all back to Trenton.

In the following years Liz attended college, worked, saved, and sent money to her family. She received her degree as an LPN in 2002, and in 2005 she applied to become a homeowner through our 100 Homes for 100 Families project, adding sweat equity obligations to her workload.

Liz is living proof that determination and hard work pay off. The year 2011 held many milestones for her. She earned her US citizenship, was certified to get a mortgage for a BCHT home, and went to Africa to search for her family in Liberia and to pick up her children in Mali to bring them home to the US.

In Liberia, Liz found what was left of her family – her mother and sister and now-grown twin sons, who had been raised by her sister. After a joyful reunion Liz went on to Mali to reunite with her husband and three children living there. She brought her children home to New Jersey, where they lived in their beautiful new BCHT house.

As she continued to try to get a visa for her husband, Liz and her children all worked hard to improve their situation. The children excelled in school and received scholarships to college. Now, **2018, is another year of milestones and celebrations.** Diamond and Muhammad graduated from college, and Muhammad is doing an internship at New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance. Ayssatu graduated from high school and is now attending Mercer County Community College. But the most wonderful event occurred when Liz' husband Mamadou arrived legally in the US, finally uniting the family as one.

Liz told us she feels so light now – most of the burden has been lifted, and she is ever grateful to God, BCHT, Father Brian, Pearleen, Gloria, and all the many people who have helped her and shared her life since she arrived in the US in 1990. BCHT is honored to be part of the life of someone as motivated and dedicated as Liz.

NEEDED WISH LIST!

Doorway to Hope – urgently needs refrigerators and stoves (new or used)

Help for rehabbing homes: volunteers for clean out, painting, etc.,

Leaders and mentors for CYO Girl Scouts to help with badges, crafts, camping, etc.

Thrift Store - our truck is on its last legs so we need repair or a new truck. Also drivers and movers for pick-ups.

We are looking for board members to help us creatively and innovatively continue the mission of BCHT.

Email us at BCHTInfo@gmail.com or use the mail icon on the website at www.BCHTrenton.org

Office 609-989-0271. Like BCHT on Facebook now!

Better Community Housing of Trenton, Inc.

In This Issue: Another rehabbed home, a homeowner's story, new look for Thrift Store, CYO collaboration

BCHT Advisory Board Members at CYO Summer Camp

BCHT Advisory Board members, volunteering through the Social Concerns Committee of St. David the King Catholic Community, worked for the sixth summer with the E. State Street CYO (formerly the Martin



Campers Doing Yoga with BCHT Advisors

House Learning Center), offering enrichment activities to the campers on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The enrichment theme this year was "From Many, One." Activities were designed to point out that we are individuals and that coming together allows us to be something new and bigger than ourselves. Activities included Yoga, Mindfulness, keyboard/vocal/orchestral music awareness, making musical instruments, planting seeds and keeping track of how they grow, and filling "buckets" with good deeds. Over 100 campers and 30 volunteers participated.

YOU CAN HELP! WE NEED YOUR MONETARY, SPIRITUAL, AND VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

I UNDERSTAND THE NEED AND WANT TO JOIN THE EFFORT:

A **CO-CREATOR'S Pledge** of \$10,000 to support housing for the poor and community action in the inner-city

I/We pledge \$ _____ over 1 year 3 years... in monthly payments of \$ _____ Starting on: _____ (DATE)

I/We want to support **BCH of Trenton/Doorway to Hope/the Thrift Store**. Enclosed is a gift of:

\$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 Other: \$ _____ (OPTIONAL:) Designated for: _____

PLEASE PRINT :

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Address: _____ Email: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Company: _____ (Enclose matching gift form)

Donate at BCHTrenton.org or mail to: BCH of Trenton, PO Box 298, Trenton, NJ 08602 (Make all checks payable to BCH of Trenton, Inc. *)

*BCH of Trenton, Inc. is qualified by the IRS to receive contributions that are deductible for federal income tax purposes. This charitable organization is registered with the Attorney General of the State of New Jersey. Information may be obtained by calling: (973) 504-6215. Registration does not imply endorsement.