From Head Start child to New York City lawyer

The profound impact of your investment 25 years later

Nhu-Y Ngo was three when she enrolled in Head Start. Born in Vietnam, Nhu-Y had recently immigrated to the United States with her mom and dad. As you might imagine, when they first arrived in Lincoln they had little to call their own. While they found shelter in the small room of a basement church, the space offered limited resources to stimulate Nhu-Y’s rapidly developing mind. Head Start filled that gap.

Now 28 and a lawyer in New York City, Nhu-Y recalls what being in Head Start meant to her so many years ago. “When my parents decided to come to America, it was because they wanted to ensure a better future for me and my siblings, particularly in regard to education,” she said. “Head Start opened me up to a whole new world. I remember many things about Head Start – my teachers, all of the bright colors in my classroom – but most of all, I remember this brown cloth bag full of books that I got to take home from class with me each week. I’d spend hours looking at those books just turning the pages, examining the words, and looking at the pictures. From that moment on, I was hooked on learning.”

And learn she did. It was during her time in Head Start when Nhu-Y learned how to speak English, where she learned to recognize numbers, recite the alphabet, and how to write her name – both in English and Vietnamese. It was also where she got to interact with other children for the very first time in her life. “Even as a child, I can remember feeling isolated. Head Start gave me – and my family – opportunities to engage with and learn from others.”

Head Start was what Nhu-Y describes as her “launching pad” to education. In 2005, she became the first in her family to graduate from high school, receiving a full scholarship to attend Columbia University. She went on to attend law school at UCLA and passed the California bar exam in 2014. She is now staff attorney at the Legal-Aid Society in New York City where she provides legal counsel and advocacy on behalf of immigrants and the under-represented.

“I credit Head Start for helping me to get where I am today,” Nhu-Y said. “It was while I was in Head Start where I began my love for learning. Head Start was a place I wanted to go. And eventually, school and college were also places I wanted to go, too. Head Start accepted me and my family how we were and helped us to adjust to a new environment. I really don’t know where I’d be today if I hadn’t been given that opportunity.”

Thank you for investing in children like Nhu-Y – children who have all the potential in the world to be successful if given the opportunity. You are making an immeasurable difference – not only in children’s lives, but in the long-term prosperity of our community and our world.

Nhu-Y and her mom and dad photographed by the capital building just after landing in Lincoln from Vietnam

Nhu-Y and her parents at her scholarship reception at the Harry Truman Library

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Nhu-Y at her graduation from Columbia University with her mom

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Issue 1 / March 2016
The importance of your financial support is greater now than ever before.

Thank you for providing HOPE to so many people who need it.

Greetings, friend! It is my absolute pleasure to bring you the inaugural issue of our newsletter. Stories focus on all of the truly wonderful things that are happening in peoples’ lives and as a result of your financial support. No matter how you choose to give to Community Action, your generous support makes this community a better place to live.

Community Action has been serving southeast Nebraska since 1965 — you may have been with us last fall when we commemorated our 50th year of service.

In our 50-year history, the importance of your support of our work to fight poverty is greater than ever. Though the city of Lincoln and surrounding Lancaster and Saunders Counties fare well on many fronts, there are many indicators of significant need. To name just a few examples, the number of people living in poverty has increased by 58% since 2005; in 2000, Lincoln had zero neighborhoods in extreme poverty — we now have six; and nearly 44,000 of our neighbors face hunger every day, over one-third of whom are children.

Your support is so critical in keeping people stable and able to work toward better futures. Last year, your financial support allowed us to provide services to 15,696 individuals — services that kept families in their homes; alleviated hunger; allowed people to gain greater financial stability; and that prepared our community’s youngest and most vulnerable children for success in school.

Thank you for providing hope to all of the children and adults who come through our doors each day. I hope this newsletter brings you half the amount of joy that you bring to so many people right here in our community each day.

With gratitude,

Vi See
Executive Director
When his beloved wife Martha was being hospitalized for health complications due to cancer, Dwight Peterson thought that life couldn’t possibly feel emptier. That was, until he was diagnosed with cancer himself two weeks later…

It seemed like an unbelievable scenario – one that Dwight struggled to believe himself. You see, up until very recently, Dwight and Martha had lived a good life – a life free of much pain and suffering. They’d raised their children right here in Lincoln, owned their own home, and had jobs that afforded them the ability to live comfortably, even after they retired. Never once did they have to ask for help; nor did they ever plan to.

But neither one of them could have predicted that cancer would strike both of them in within a matter a two-week time period. Neither one of them could have predicted that they’d have to deplete their savings to pay medical bills; that they’d have to worry about how they were going to put food on the table or pay their utility bills. And on a cold autumn day when they received a shut-off notice from their utility company, they knew they had to act quickly. They knew they had to ask for help.

**Thanks to your financial support to our Gift of Warmth Campaign**, we were able to provide Dwight and Martha with the emergency financial assistance necessary to reconnect their utilities – to keep them safe and warm in their home in their time of need. When we called to let them know we’d be able to help, Dwight was driving Martha back from the hospital where she had just received her chemo treatment. He had to pull over because he was too overcome with emotion – thanking us through tears.

It’s a wonderful feeling to know that you have made a difference in someone’s life. We hope you know how much your financial support means to people like Martha and Dwight – to the thousands who come to us each year in similar situations. Thank you.
Your famous home cooking wanted!

We know you have passion for feeding those who are hungry, but we are curious: do you also love to cook or bake? We would love for kind individuals like you to share your homemade cookies, brownies, or other dessert bars for meals served at The Gathering Place. Desserts are needed to feed approximately 100 people each week night.

If you’re interested in providing a homemade dish to share for an evening meal at The Gathering Place once, or perhaps on a recurring basis, contact Heather Loughman at (402) 875-9339 or hloughman@communityactionatwork.org.

Note from Heather Loughman, Development Manager

Here to make your giving experience the best it can be!

You have passion for the community and the people in it. You’ve entrusted your hard-earned dollars in us to fulfill this passion. The power of this exchange is profound. I want you to know that it is my absolute priority to ensure your giving experience with Community Action is the most rewarding experience possible. If you’d ever like to get together, learn about additional ways to get involved, or simply have questions, please contact me at (402) 875-9339 or hloughman@communityactionatwork.org. Look forward to connecting soon!

Children NEED YOU to be their heroes!

YES, I want to help empower people living in poverty to reach economic stability.

☐ Please accept my gift of $ _____________________________

Your donation will go toward supporting:

- Feeding those who are hungry at The Gathering Place
- Preparing children for success in school
- Keeping families safe and warm in their homes
- Helping families learn financial skills/save for a home, post-secondary education, or small business start-up

May we publish your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, how would you like your name(s) to appear?

__________________________________________________

Payment Options:

☐ Check payable to Community Action
☐ Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ AmEx ☐ Discover

Account # ____________________________________________
Exp. Date (mo/yr) _____________ Security Code ____________
Signature ___________________________________ Date __________

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Hope Inside

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