



Hope Inside



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For 35 years, The Gathering Place has been providing Lincolnites hot evening meals and a space to feel warm and welcome

As we recognize this milestone anniversary, we thank you

On Wednesday, October 25th The Gathering Place celebrated its 35th anniversary in Lincoln. The milestone event was celebrated at The Gathering Place by guests, volunteers, donors, staff, and founders. Valentino's, the event sponsor, generously provided the dinner for all to enjoy,



Community Action's Board of Directors presents the first donation to The Gathering Place's 35th Anniversary Campaign in honor of the founders.

and volunteers from Lincoln Rotary Club #14 helped with serving. Vi See, Executive Director of Community Action, kicked off the program portion of the event followed by congratulatory words from Lancaster County Commissioner Jennifer Brinkman.

Concluding the program was Joyce Sturdy, one of six Gathering Place founders, who shared memories of The Gathering Place's first days of operation. The memories shared highlighted the intent of The Gathering Place when it first opened – as a space

where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy; as a space designed to give people the opportunity to make change happen. Although service offerings at The Gathering Place have transformed over the years, this original intent remains present to this day.

The event provided an opportune time to kick off our 35th Anniversary Campaign for The Gathering Place. Thanks to generous contributions from Rogers Foundation, Union Bank & Trust, Greenwald Family Charitable Trust, Inspro Insurance, Unico Group, Inc., and Sue Quambusch and Len Sloup, all donations received for The Gathering Place through December 31st will be matched \$.87 on the dollar. Community Action's board of directors gave the first donation at the event to honor the founders, whose collective vision has improved countless lives in the city.

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What guests love most about coming to The Gathering Place, in their words:

"It's a blessing to be treated with dignity and respect."

"The food, the volunteers, the staff, and never having to worry where my next meal is coming from."

"The people are nice and the food is good. It's a quiet place to eat."

"What I love most are the caring hearts of the volunteers who come to feed the community with respect, kindness, and generosity. Thank you!"

We have just \$11,331.18 left to raise before the end of the year to meet our campaign goal and claim \$30,500 committed by our match sponsors. Will you help us get there?



The Gathering Place was packed with event attendees on October 25th. Were you there, too?

Holiday thanks and a year in review

Thank you for making 2017 a great year at Community Action

Dear Friend,

Happy holidays to you and your family. Difficult as it is to believe, it is once again that time of year – time to gather around and celebrate with family; time for gifts and holiday meals; and time to reflect upon all of the things we have been grateful for over the past year.

And as I reflect upon the past year, I am certainly grateful. It has been a remarkable year here at Community Action, and so much of that is due to you. You have given in countless ways to make the lives of those struggling in poverty brighter. From donating funds to provide our Head Start enrolled children with books, to generously contributing on Give to Lincoln Day (and

helping us to experience our most successful year yet!), to funding and serving hot meals at The Gathering Place, to bringing comfort and hope to near homeless and homeless families – you have touched so many lives over the past year. None of the remarkable success stories we share with you throughout the year would be possible without your generous support. And I want you to know how much your friendship means to us... but more significantly, our participants.

Your support also allows us the opportunity to grow – to build capacity and expand our programming to better serve those living in poverty. Over the past year, we have implemented many new programs and initiatives focused on improving family well-being, preventing and eliminating homelessness,

and providing the high-quality supports children need to be ready for kindergarten. As you know, there are 41,000 people right here in Lincoln who are struggling in poverty. With your support, we have the opportunity to serve more people – to fight poverty in a way that is responsive to the unique needs of our community. In fact, over our past fiscal year, we served 17,499 people – 1,700 more than the previous year. We wouldn't have been able to do it without you.

You may have seen over the past year that Community Action received honors as one of Lincoln's Best Places to Work. This was certainly very exciting, and I think it is a great reflection of the dedication and passion of our team. They are truly committed to our mission, supporting our participants in a way that is empowering... in a way that restores in them a



sense of confidence that things will get better. So perhaps above all else, when you give to Community Action, you give the gift of hope.

I hope you and your family enjoy a wonderful holiday season. Thank you for all of the ways you give to make a difference.

Sincerely,

Vi See
Executive Director

When her husband died unexpectedly, Judy's life was turned upside down

Your support brought her hope just when she thought things couldn't get worse

At just 35 years old, Judy Michaelson became a widow and single mother when her husband died unexpectedly in a car accident. As you can imagine, Judy's grief was unbearable. The pure shock from

the incident kept Judy paralyzed – she could barely eat...she couldn't sleep... she had no idea how to function. But somehow, she had to find a way. She had to find a way to do her best for her son, Ben. And that's what she did. She woke up at 6:30 every morning to get Ben off to school. She washed his clothes after baseball practice. She heated up the frozen meals that her friends had brought over for dinner. She eventually went back to work. And she tried every day to put on a brave face...to maintain at least some sense of normalcy in a very turbulent time.

One afternoon, about a month after her husband died, Judy came home from work and flipped on the light switch in the foyer. But the light didn't shine. Confused, she flicked the light switch again and again...still nothing. She tried the light switch in the kitchen, and then

the living room. Nothing. She went down to the basement to check the breaker. All seemed fine. And then it hit her...she had forgotten to pay the electric bill...her fears were confirmed upon seeing the shut-off notice on her front door.

Judy instantly went into a panic... how, she asked herself, *could she let this happen?* The panic turned into tears as she thought about what her son would think when he got home from school. She knew she had to act quickly. Letting her son come home to this was not an option.

She dialed the phone and was eventually connected with our Emergency Services department. She explained the situation... *my husband used to handle paying all of our bills*, she told us, doing her best not to cry. And because of your support of Emergency Services, and our partnership with Lincoln Electric System, we were able to approve Judy for assistance on the spot. And her lights were on when Ben got home from school.





A Collective *Crunch*

A glimpse into how your support promotes health and nutrition within Early Head Start and Head Start

In celebration of National Farm to School month, our Early Head Start and Head Start programs celebrated the Midwest Great Apple Crunch on October 26th. Children were given an apple and were prompted to take a bite after saying, in unison, “5-4-3-2-1 Crunch!” Many parents participated as well!

The Midwest Great Apple Crunch encourages healthy eating and supports farm to school and other local food purchasing initiatives throughout the region. It’s also a fun way to connect food and agriculture to all kinds of classroom curriculum – from science to art.

The children in Early Head Start and Head Start certainly enjoyed their apple provided by the Hamburg, Iowa orchard cared for by Marty and Amy Mincer. The children learned about the 37 different kinds of apples the Iowa orchard grows. And by the smiles on their faces, they certainly enjoyed!

You have helped the Mullins family realize their dream of home ownership

A look inside their new home, their life, and the impact of your support of Community Action

you... you feel the comfort and familiarity of home.

Jenika and Michael Mullins recently purchased their new home with support from our Individual Development Accounts program – with support from donors like you. While in the program, Jenika and Michael worked to build their credit and learned everything they needed to know about buying a first-time home. They also received a 4:1 savings match for their down payment.

“This is something we have dreamed of for years,” says Jenika. “Getting to this point has taken a lot of hard work, and we are thankful for the program and its donors for supporting us along the way.”

In speaking with Jenika and Michael, there is a great amount of pride in the life that they have built for themselves and their family. Their kitchen table, which they gather around each night for dinner, is engraved with words describing their family: *a circle of strength, founded on faith, joined in love, kept by God, together forever.* Everything they have is the result of hard work and dedication. Both

Jenika and Michael work 70-80 hours each week while raising their two young children and fostering Jenika’s teenage sister. And despite all that Jenika and Michael have on their proverbial plate, they continue to dream. Eventually they hope to open their own business specializing in selling outdoor and sporting equipment. “We’ve already written a business plan,” says Jenika. And it’s in the way that she says it, so confidently and definitively, that you know it will happen someday.

When leaving the Mullins home, the pathway to your vehicle illuminated by decorative lighting fixtures contrasting the night sky, it occurs to you that Jenika and Michael’s lives have changed not just because they are new homeowners – but because they have the belief in their ability to realize their dreams. Their success is a powerful illustration of your support of Community Action at work – support that stabilizes, support that gives opportunity, support that empowers. Thank you.



Home is where your story begins. Jenika and Michael happily posing for a picture in their new kitchen.

When you walk into the Mullins’ home, you instantly feel welcome. A candle flickers in the kitchen near framed portraits of Jenika and Michael on their wedding day. Wood paneling lines the walls of the living and dining rooms, amplifying the glow of the amber lights and warmth radiating from the wood stove. You feel the love and happiness that surrounds



First National Bank delivering a \$7,500 grant on November 7th. Pictured (from left): Jack Weeks, First National Bank; Vi See, Community Action; Andrew Ritta, Community Action, and Michelle St. Clair, First National Bank.

Thank you to First National Bank for their recent support

Last month, First National Bank delivered a \$7,500 grant to support the work of our Individual Development Accounts program. These funds will help families like the Mullins build strong financial futures. Thank you for your continued support, First National Bank!

Jenika and Michael’s son loves his new room – especially his bunk bed with a slide on it!



Foster Grandparents: Role models, mentors, and friends

In our last newsletter, we told you about our receipt of the Foster Grandparent grant awarded by the Corporation for National and Community Services. Over the past couple of months, we have been busy implementing this great program. Our Foster Grandparents have an incredible impact on the children enrolled in our Early Head Start and Head Start Programs. The Foster Grandparents work with classroom teachers in completing lesson plans, small group activities, facilitating mealtime discussions, and guiding children through their daily routines. The one-on-one attention the Foster Grandparent provides helps children

in the development of social-emotional skills that they need to be ready for kindergarten. We thank our Foster Grandparents, and invite you to say “hello” next time you’re at our centers!

Babies love Grandma Vertie, one of our many dedicated Foster Grandparents!



Lincoln Stars make a special delivery

Our Early Head Start and Head Start enrolled children were thrilled to see players from the Lincoln Stars on December 5th when they came out to our Health 360 Center to deliver teddy bears given by fans at their annual Teddy Bear Toss game. Each child got to choose which bear they wanted to keep, and it’s safe to say many smiles were had all around. We thank the Lincoln Stars, their partners, and 104.1 The Blaze for helping to make this effort possible year after year!



We’re thinking this little bear will be very loved!

The Gathering Place (continued)

As a Gathering Place supporter, you know how needed the meals served are in this community. Over 41,000 people in Lancaster County don’t know where their next meal is coming from. Thanks to your support, The Gathering Place is able to help to fill this need, serving 25,266 meals so far this year.

Since the date of our 35th anniversary celebration, Gathering Place friends like you have contributed \$23,668.82 to our campaign,

leveraging \$20,591.87 from our match sponsors. Your support has been tremendous! Funds raised will provide critical support to Gathering Place operations over the next year.

As we celebrate The Gathering Place’s 35th anniversary, we thank you for your loyal support. You are the reason The Gathering Place is able to continue to offer food and comfort to those in our community who are struggling with hunger.

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
- Preventing and eliminating homelessness
- Helping families learn financial skills/save for a home, post-secondary education, or small business start-up

I would like to designate my gift to the following program (e.g. The Gathering Place, Supportive Housing Program)

I have included (or intend to include) Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties in my will or estate.

My name _____
 Company _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Phone _____
 Email _____

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 Discover

Account # _____

Exp. Date (mo/yr) _____ Security Code _____

Signature _____ Date _____

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