

# Hope Inside

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## From Shock to Struggle to *Hope*

*When she was diagnosed with cancer, Mandy found herself in not only emotional, but financial crisis. Your support kept her stably housed.*

At 52, Mandy Montag still felt like she had her whole life ahead of her. She had a great job of nearly 25 years, a nice apartment, a husband who loved her, and children who were successfully off to college. Mandy was proud of who she was and what she had accomplished in life. Through many years of hard work, she had moved up in the ranks at her company and was compensated appropriately. She never had to struggle. Her ability to pay monthly bills was never in question, and in fact, she had been able to put away quite a good amount in savings over the years. Mandy thought she was about to embark on the best years of her life. That was, until, she was diagnosed with cancer.

The diagnosis had shaken Mandy to the core. Each morning she would wake up asking herself how this could have happened. *How, after working hard her entire life, did she end up here?* But even through the shock, Mandy had a steadfast will to survive. She began chemotherapy,

thankful that her health insurance covered a good portion of the cost. She even continued to work each day, despite the somewhat debilitating side-effects of her treatment. But it wasn't long before the chemo began to take its toll. Mandy became so weak and so sick that she could no longer work. She had to quit the job that she loved – the high-level position she had worked so hard over the years to attain. It was a huge loss – a loss of her identity... a loss of pride...

and most frightening, a loss of income and health insurance.

Suddenly, Mandy and her husband found themselves in not only emotional, but financial crisis. With no health insurance, Mandy had to deplete her savings to pay for the treatment she needed so desperately to get better. And surviving on only her husband's income, it wasn't long before the cost of living became too much to keep up with. They tried everything they could to make ends-meet – selling their furniture, taking odd jobs, even dumpster diving at their lowest point. It was no use. They got behind on their rent and were suddenly facing

eviction. It was a situation that seemed too unreal to be true; a nightmare.

Mandy and her husband knew they needed help. They applied for rent payment assistance through our Emergency Services program and were approved. When



*Cancer robbed Mandy of her health, identity, and economic standing. Your support restored in her a sense of hope*

they learned that all of their rent arrears would be paid in full by our program – that they could remain in their home – Mandy and her husband were overcome with emotion. Since getting this assistance, the couple has stabilized and Mandy's health has improved significantly, allowing her to look for a new job. Without the support of friends like you, we would have not been able to provide this assistance. Mandy and her husband would have been stranded in crisis. Your generous support helps people regain stability in their darkest hours and move forward. Thank you.

## New Year, New Efforts to Fight Poverty in Lancaster and Saunders Counties

Greetings, and welcome to our first newsletter of 2017! With the new year (is the new year still “new” in March?), I wanted to take this opportunity to share some information with you about three new poverty-fighting efforts here at Community Action.

The first is Lincoln Community Response. In partnership with United Way of Lincoln and Lancaster County, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), and several other human service agencies, Lincoln Community Response is aimed at supporting and linking families to resources to prevent entry into the child welfare system. In 2015 according to DHHS, there were 6,295 calls to the child abuse and neglect line in Lancaster County, which

accounted for nearly 20% of calls made in the state. This program is completely focused on preventing situations that could lead to abuse or neglect. It will be housed at The Gathering Place and focused on serving families in the McPhee Elementary School neighborhood.

The second new program is an extension of our Emergency Services program and is in partnership with the City of Lincoln. It will provide emergency assistance to families whose homes have been “red-tagged” (i.e. determined uninhabitable). Families affected often have nowhere to turn when this occurs, which has potential to force them into homeless situations. This program will provide assistance to get families affected back into

stable housing as quickly as possible.

Also focused on homelessness prevention, our final new program is in partnership with NCFF and is an extension of our Tenant Support Services program called Youth Eviction Prevention. This program is specifically focused on preventing evictions among unconnected youth, ensuring they have the information they need to be successful renters and maintain positive relationships with their landlords.

At Community Action, we are constantly striving to increase our capacity to fight poverty. The needs within our community are



Me with the three Community Action staff overseeing our new programs: Lisa Janssen (Community Response), Neva Winkle (Youth Eviction Prevention), and Sarah Fentress (Red Tag Pilot).

always changing and it is only because of the support of friends like you that we are able to act quickly to address them. I hope that you will get in touch if you have any questions or input. I always appreciate hearing your ideas.

With gratitude,

Vi See  
Executive Director

## Finding his Place in Head Start

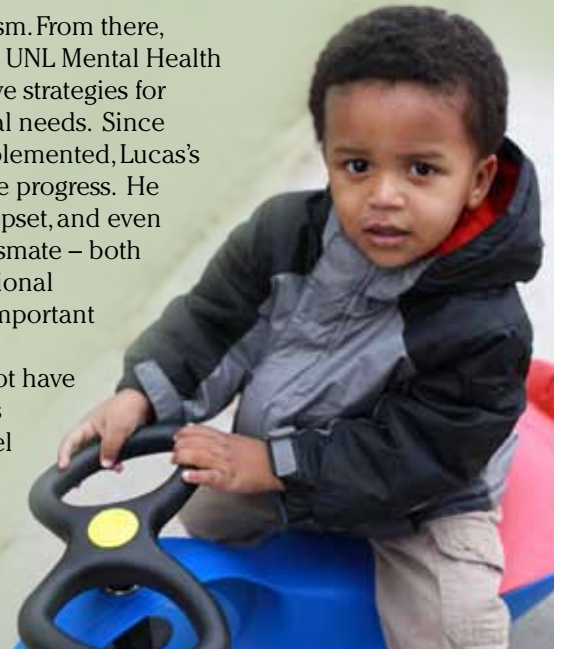
Undiagnosed autism made structured learning environments difficult for Lucas to function within. Thanks to your support, he is finding his place.

As an investor in Community Action’s early childhood programs, you know that the children we serve face some of the greatest barriers to preparing for success in kindergarten. Lucas, a toddler currently enrolled in our center-based program, is one such child. Before coming to our program, Lucas’s family had already been through a series of unsuccessful experiences within other early care environments. Lucas had difficulty sitting still in class. He’d yell or self-injure when in distress. He did not engage in classroom activities or positively interact with his peers. His family was at a loss – they weren’t sure why Lucas was having difficulties and didn’t know where to turn. Until they found Head Start.

When he first enrolled in our program, Lucas was provided a developmental screening. The screening revealed the reason Lucas had been

having difficulty – he had autism. From there, teachers coordinated with our UNL Mental Health Consultants to develop effective strategies for meeting Lucas’s developmental needs. Since these strategies have been implemented, Lucas’s teachers have reported positive progress. He is now using his words when upset, and even shared a toy with a fellow classmate – both signs of increased social-emotional competence, which is a very important indicator of school readiness.

Without you, Lucas would not have received the services he needs to enter kindergarten on a level playing field with his peers. Your support gives all children the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Thank you.



# Working Toward Her Career and So Much More

**Jess's journey toward economic stability continues every day, but one thing is for certain: she's arrived.**

Jess begins her internship at Community Action on a chilly Monday morning in January. In just a few short months, she will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Nebraska Wesleyan University. She is working within our Financial Well-being program to get first-hand experience supporting participants in their journeys toward something better – helping them budget, open savings accounts, develop plans to reduce debt and improve credit, and remove other financial barriers.

Jess has arrived here because she deeply desires to empower others to change their lives – to be there for her community just like her community was there for her. You see, since graduating from high school in 2003, Jess has experienced her own challenges. “I will never forget the day,” Jess says when referencing her lowest point – the day she was arrested for drug possession

in 2009. “Thankfully, I was able to participate in Drug Court instead of going to prison. It was definitely the wake-up call I needed.”

But after graduating from Drug Court, Jess's struggles continued. She found herself homeless and depended upon community resources to survive. Securing a job allowed her to move out of the shelter and into a place of her own, but her income was still very limited and making ends-meet was difficult. “The apartment I moved into was near The Gathering Place, and I often went there for meals,” Jess says, “I always found it to be a very safe place to go.”

In 2011, Jess welcomed her first child into the world – a baby girl – and it was around that time she decided to go back to school. She earned her associates from S.C.C. and immediately enrolled at Wesleyan toward a bachelor's thereafter. She will graduate in May, but not before completing her internship here at Community Action where, she says, she continues to learn more about her career path and herself every day.

“It's a blessing that I've ended up here,” Jess says with tears in her eyes, “the people I get to work with here motivate me every day to continue to be better. I've also learned a lot about my own personal finances. For the first time in my life, I have money in a savings account and no longer live paycheck to paycheck. For the first time in a long time, I see a bright future ahead.”

Your support of Community Action empowers people like Jess to make positive changes every day. And in some special cases, it inspires them to empower others, too.



## With record demand for meals, your financial support of **The Gathering Place** is hard at work.

**Here's a quick look into “what's cooking” thanks to you.**

The first few months of 2017 have been especially busy at The Gathering Place. On President's Day (February 20th), 194 meals were served – a record for any single night. January saw a total of 2,155 meals served and just a slightly fewer 1,997 in February. It is only because of your loyal financial support that we have been able to keep pace with this increased demand.

Despite the increased quantity of food he has had to prepare, James – our resident chef – has not skimped on quality. Pictured are just some



*Homemade fried chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetable medley, and crusty bread donated by Le Quartier Bakery & Café in Lincoln.*

of the recent home-cooked and comforting meals James has created. It wouldn't be possible without you!



*Colorful salads are a James Reilly specialty. Planting a garden this spring? We gladly accept fresh produce donations if you have extras!*



*James at his daily post in The Gathering Place kitchen. The stove we purchased a few years ago with grant funding from the May L. Flanagan Foundation definitely comes in handy!*

# March is Reading Month! Will you help us put books in the homes of Lincoln children?

**Books:** they have the power to ignite our imaginations and transport us into extraordinary worlds. Books not only improve our quality of life, they are also important tools young children need to learn...to be ready to achieve success in kindergarten.

**Unfortunately, not all children have access to books while they are at home.** In the spirit of Reading Month, which is during the month of March, Community Action is asking your help to build at-home libraries for the babies, toddlers, and preschoolers enrolled in our Early Head Start and Head Start programs.



## Here's How You Can Help

**Sponsor a child** – \$25 provides a sack of 5 books for one child.

**Sponsor a classroom** – \$200 provides books for all children in an infant/toddler classroom and \$425 provides books for all children in a preschool classroom.

To donate now, or to learn more about the campaign, visit [www.communityactionatwork.org](http://www.communityactionatwork.org) or use the attached reply device and designate "Head Start Book Campaign." Thank you for your support!

Remember to Give to Community Action on

**give**  
To Lincoln Day

May 18, 2017.  
More details coming soon!



## Eating Healthy Made Tasty and Fun

*Early Head Start children enjoy making their own "crunchy color wraps" at a recent socialization event*

Did you know that we develop lifelong preferences for food in the first few years of our lives? Indeed, introducing foods like fruits and vegetables to children in their first years is important in their ability to develop a taste for them

long-term. On March 8th, children in our Early Head Start Home-based program made crunchy color wraps at a socialization event. With help from their parents, children got to decorate their own whole wheat tortilla with produce represented by

various colors of the rainbow – lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, and red cabbage. Their colorful creations were then wrapped up and enjoyed!

**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

I would like to designate my gift to the following program (e.g. The Gathering Place, Head Start Book Campaign)

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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