

# The Long Journey to Homeownership



*“I couldn’t believe it. People would give up their free time to come and help build my house. The volunteers had such a positive spirit. Nothing I did felt like work.”* Abu Lahun

The Lahun family moved into their first home, a Habitat home, in 2014. It was a long journey to homeownership. Abu Lahun was born in Liberia, and he lived there until devastating civil wars in the 1990s drove him out of Liberia and into neighboring Sierra Leone. During 15 years there, Abu met and married his wife, Mariatu, and two sons were born. When Liberia’s wars spilled over into Sierra Leone, Abu and Mariatu were desperate to move their family to safety. Abu described to me his joy at learning that the United States had accepted their application for emigration in 2003. Abu was already fluent in English and, most importantly, “it was a place where we could get away from violence permanently.” The next year, the Lahun family entered the U.S. and resettled in New Haven to begin rebuilding their lives.

The Lahun family worked hard to establish themselves. Abu now holds a commercial driver’s license and has a full-time position with First Transit driving Yale shuttle busses. He also works part-time as a bus driver for the North Branford School District. In 2008, they were granted U.S. Citizenship. Two daughters joined their family, Baindu and Iisatu. The Lahuns started out living in a single room, and then moved to a much larger apartment. However, the heating system worked poorly, the walls were uninsulated and, with electric heat, bills were enormous. Umarr, their 11 year old son, remembers vividly how cold the apartment was. “We all wore coats inside. It was too cold to take them off. I tried not to get up at night because it was even colder then and, if I got out of bed,



Upper left: Abu and his youngest son, Umarr.  
Above: The Lahun Habitat home.

I’d never get warm again.” In 2013 the Lahuns applied for Habitat’s program.

After a rigorous application process, the family was approved for a Habitat home on Congress Ave in New Haven. Between 2012-2013 Habitat built eight homes there, transforming an area that had been dominated by blighted homes and empty lots. Habitat requires future homeowners to volunteer a minimum of 400 hours of volunteer labor (“sweat equity”) helping to build their home. Abu worked alongside volunteers and the construction staff more than 500 hours, stating “I wanted to be there for

*(continued on back)*

## Help Us Build Community ...one house, one family at a time

For more information about Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven, Inc. visit [www.habitatgnh.org](http://www.habitatgnh.org) or call 203-785-0794

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Please return this form in the enclosed envelope, or contribute online at [www.habitatgnh.org](http://www.habitatgnh.org). Thank you!

every part of the building. It was my training. I didn't know how to do anything handy before Habitat." Most of all, meeting and working with hundreds of community volunteers was extremely memorable he said, "I couldn't believe it. People would give up

their free time to come and help build my house. The volunteers had such a positive spirit. Nothing I did felt like work." Dedication day, the ceremony in which Habitat celebrates handing the home over to its new owner family, was "wow" day for the Lahun family, as they describe it, "It became real for the first time."

The Lahuns have been living at 837 Congress Avenue for nearly a year now and have settled in. With his new carpentry skills, Abu is building a shed in the backyard, and last spring they planted a large vegetable garden. Inside, the white walls have been transformed to colors and decorated with family photographs and art work. The home is modestly sized at 1,300 square feet, but its



The Lahun family and friends building a shed in the backyard.

open floor plan gives it a spacious feeling. Best of all, according to the Lahun kids, the house is warm even in the winter! They are looking forward to celebrating Thanksgiving in their own home for the first time.

Abu and Mariatu, like all Habitat homeowners, purchased their home from our organization with a 25-year, zero percent interest mortgage. A typical Habitat home sells for \$96,000 with monthly mortgage payments of \$300 (excluding insurance and taxes). Owning an affordable, safe, well-built home provides stability and allows families to launch themselves in a cycle of progress, possibility and a better quality of life. Homeownership rekindles hope and allows families and our community to thrive.

There are many hard-working families that qualify for Habitat's program. We need your help to serve them. *Please help us by donating today.*



# Habitat News

Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven  
Winter 2014

## ReStore

In 2013 the organization fulfilled a longstanding desire to open a donation based retail store (named ReStore). Proceeds from the store are used to build Habitat homes in New Haven County. ReStore sells new and gently used building materials, appliances, furniture and household items, windows, doors, cabinets, and more. We are pleased to say that ReStore is a tremendous success thanks to a strong customer base and generous donors.

Stop by and see the store:

286 S. Colony Rd Wallingford

Have items to donate? Call (203) 774-7560

*Pick-up service may be available for large items*



## Habitat Builds Green and Fortified!

Our organization makes it a priority to build Habitat homes that are energy efficient, environmentally friendly and can withstand major storms. Habitat homes are built using the highest Energy Star standards, and each home is tested and rated by an independent energy specialist. Aside from reducing the home's environmental footprint, the savings are passed on to the homebuyer. In response to the increasing number of storms in our area, we partnered with Travelers to adopt the Fortified Home Gold building standards. Travelers chose our organization as the model in the Northeast for demonstrating how housing developers can combine higher building standards with affordable housing development.



## Cars for Homes

Each year our Habitat affiliate is able to help a greater number of Habitat families thanks to donations of cars and other motorized vehicles through the Cars for Homes Program. Last year our organization reached the top twelve of more than 1,400 affiliates nationwide for amounts raised through Cars for Homes donations. Help up spread the word: have a car, RV, boat, motorcycle or other vehicle you want to get rid of? All conditions accepted! The program is easy and convenient. Call 877-277-4344 for more information or to schedule a pick up. In return, you will be provided a tax receipt and all proceeds from your donation will help build Habitat homes in New Haven County.

## Helping Veterans

The organization has created a new program, Homes for Heroes, that provides homeownership opportunities specifically for veterans in need. Each year we will designate a Habitat home building project as a Homes for Heroes Habitat home. Because we design and build our own homes we are able to accommodate special physical needs. The home site has been chosen and family selection is underway for a 2014/2015 Homes for Heroes project.