

The Long Journey to Homeownership

The family highlighted in this letter is one of 100 families who own a Habitat for Humanity home in New Haven County. In 2012 Alhaji “Sam” and Adama Sankoh and their five-year old daughter, Fatu, moved into their Habitat home on Congress Avenue in New Haven.

Throughout the home building process, Sam and Adama told not a single family member, friend or employer that they were chosen for Habitat’s homeownership program or that they were spending all of their free time building a home. Sam said, “I was afraid to tell anyone. It seemed too good to be true. I did not fully believe that the house we were building would really be my home. What if somehow it was taken away from us?” It was only when the Sankohs were told to begin preparing for the mortgage closing did Sam let himself believe it was real. Just prior to the dedication ceremony celebrating the completion of the home, Sam began to call people and invite them for a drive. He took each person to Congress Avenue, pointed to the nearly completed house and announced, “See that house? That will be our home. We built it.”

Sam and Adama grew up in a small city in Sierra Leone, one house apart from each other, in a multi-cultural city with many opportunities. In the early 90s, as Sam was preparing to go to college, normal life came to an abrupt halt when Liberia’s terrible civil war spilled over the border into their country. Only 70 miles from the border, their city was one of the first areas terrorized by rebel forces. Adama and her family fled to Freetown, the capital city. Sam’s parents didn’t want to leave their home and city, but they convinced Sam to flee to Freetown with his cousins. Young men in the path of the rebel army were a primary target to either be killed, maimed, or pressed into service as a soldier and forced to kill their own people. For seven years, Sam struggled to survive, and he witnessed horrific violence. “No human being should ever experience such things. Each day I believed it might be my last,” he says. Fortunately several countries opened up resettlement programs, and the United States was the first country to accept him.

In 1999 Sam entered the United States with the help of a sponsoring church in Guilford. Sam worked hard to establish himself. He began working as a laborer but shortly after, secured employment at West Haven Lumber. He worked his way up through a variety of departments, and in 2015 he was promoted to warehouse manager. He adjusted to the cold and snow, and made friends. A terrible weight on him was his inability to locate or contact his family in Sierra Leone for the first three years he was in the United States. With the help of a BBC radio program in Sierra Leone that broadcast the names

(continued on back)



“Hard work is something I’m used to. Some of the best people I’ve met in my life were volunteering with me. It was like a big family.” Alhaji “Sam” Sankoh



Top: Sam, his daughter Fatu, and Adama.
Above: The Sankoh Habitat home.

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 or call 203-785-0794

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$35 ☐ Other \$ _____

You can make your tax-deductible gift to:
Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven, Inc.
37 Union Street, New Haven Connecticut 06511

☐ Check ☐ Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ AmEx Amount \$ _____

Name (as it appears on card): _____

Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____ Phone _____

Signature _____ Email: _____

Please return this form in the enclosed envelope, or contribute online at www.habitatgnh.org. Thank you!

If you wish to be removed from the HfHGNH appeal list, please return this form with your request or email jrook@habitatgnh.org

Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven does not sell, rent or give away names of donors.

of the missing, a cousin heard it and called him. His father was no longer alive, but his mother and younger siblings had survived, and they re-established their relationships long-distance. Sam's mother reminded him about Adama, the girl he had grown up with, and the two of them began talking on the phone regularly.

Sam was granted his citizenship in 2005, and by 2006, he could afford to travel back to his former country to see his family. He and Adama were married during his visit. She joined Sam in the United States after a two-year separation waiting for her visa to be granted. Once united, they lived in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in West Haven. Their daughter Fatu was born and their apartment became much too small for their family. They also faced a hostile neighbor with addiction issues. "We had to keep Fatu quiet all the time, which is very difficult for a toddler. She wanted to play and make noise. The man downstairs scared us. He slept all day and was out all night, and he hated our child," said Adama. Increasingly desperate for a safer place to live with more than one bedroom, Sam looked at rental ads every day. They were unable to afford the rent on any two-bedroom apartment. However, he learned about Habitat's program and they applied. The day they received a call saying they had been accepted was "one of the very best days of my life," said Sam.

The Sankohs, hundreds of volunteers from the community and Habitat's construction staff built the



Alhaji "Sam" Sankoh working on his new home.

Sankoh family's home together. Sam finished his 400 hours of sweat equity and continued to help build other Habitat homes that were under construction near his home. "Hard work is something I'm used to. Some of the best people I've met in my life were volunteering with me. It was like a big family."

"Habitat changed our lives, Sam said. "When we were young, we lost a lot, more than any person ever should. It was a hard road coming back. What is most important to me, I can now do. I have a family, a house, a job, and my daughter is in school. I can meet all of our basic needs and we have stability. Our friends come over, we have a garden, Fatu can make all the noise she wants, and we have cookouts. We are safe and we are free."

The Sankoh family purchased their home from our organization with a 25-year, zero percent interest mortgage. A typical Habitat home sells for \$96,000 with a monthly mortgage payment of approximately \$300, excluding insurance and taxes. Habitat homes are energy-efficient and built to resist storms. Owning a well-built, affordable home provides stability and allows families to launch themselves into 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 2015

ReStore

In 2013 the organization fulfilled a long standing 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 Road, Wallingford

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

Pick-up service may be available for large items



Volunteer!

Every year, volunteers donate thousands of hours to HfHGNH. The support of individual and group volunteers helps us achieve our goal of building simple, decent homes for qualified low-income families.

CONSTRUCTION: Habitat volunteers build and rehab houses from start to finish under the guidance of our professional construction staff. No prior construction experience is necessary!

RESTORE At the ReStore in Wallingford, volunteers help out with customer service, merchandise display,


price research and other tasks as needed. Contact the Habitat Volunteer Coordinator at (203) 785-0794 for more information.

Cars for Homes

We are able to help more low-income families thanks to donations of cars and other motorized vehicles through the Cars for Homes Program. 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 a new program, Veterans Build, that provides homeownership opportunities for veterans in need. We recently completed a home for veteran Cheryl Eberg and her children. Cheryl served in the U.S. Army and the Connecticut Army National Guard for a total of 22 years. Six years were active duty, including serving in Iraq. She retired as 1st Sergeant of Joint Forces Headquarters in Hartford. She is now employed as a peer counselor at the VA Hospital in West Haven. The Eberg family home and the organization's first Veterans Build is located at 201 East Grand Avenue in New Haven.

 **Like us on Facebook!**

Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven | 37 Union Street, New Haven, CT 06511 | (203) 785-0794 | www.habitatgnh.org