Dear CEF Family,

“When you are with CEF, you are a part of the thread that makes us all one community.” Chinita is a CEF graduate, and her poetic statement during a CEF celebration perfectly describes the palpable connectivity in this community.

Whether we’re weaving together programs and resources to form a holistic network of support, or connecting our Members and Advocates together in people-centered relationships, CEF is steadily crafting a beautiful, interconnected, and interwoven community.

But most literally, you can see the threads stitching the CEF community together in our weekly Quilting Circle. David Lyles was staying at the shelter when he started the group. David shares, “CEF made me know that I was something special...I started the Quilting Club because I wanted to give back to CEF.”

“The thing about old-fashioned quilting is that it takes everyone together in the circle to make it. Quilting forces us to talk to each other about things and, in turn, we start to form a strong bond.”

David became homeless after almost 10 years of battling a disabling illness. He moved to Chapel Hill to be closer to his medical providers and connected with CEF shortly after moving into the shelter. He and his Advocates connected to legal assistance to help him secure disability benefits. They worked with the IFC Rapid Rehousing case manager to find him housing with temporary rental support, and David excitedly moved into a house with two roommates in December. Then, right before Christmas, he received the news that he was awarded a supportive housing voucher! He has now moved into a 2-bedroom home — a home that he can call his own for the long haul that has plenty of room for his sewing machines and quilting looms.

“Long as you got a vision, CEF can help you. And then once the vision manifests and starts working, they don’t leave you.” Now, David is working with his Advocates on budgeting and getting his small business up and rolling, an alterations business aptly named “Graceful Stitches.”

David lives a clear mission: “To make people happier in their self. Because if you make people happy in their self, other things will change.” We count ourselves endlessly lucky to be a part of David’s community, as we are constantly lifted by his presence.

We are grateful beyond measure to have worked this past year in pursuit of what David is helping CEF to build: a purposeful, connected community where each of us has the joy of sharing our gifts. Together, we thank you for being a part of the fabric of CEF, and we thank David, Chinita, and so many others for making the threads connecting us so much stronger.
“If we treat people as best as we can treat them, like we wanna be treated, we can find ourselves moving forward. And I am moving forward. I am strong and I am able to do some things that I never thought I could do.” — David

The quilt on the front cover of this report was hand-sewn by David.

THE NUMBERS

In 2017, 1,046 members worked side-by-side with 256 advocates towards their goals!
Steven gives wholeheartedly: to his friend’s college fund, to local churches, and to CEF. In one of our favorite moments from 2017, Steven surprised us with a giant $500 check at the Piggy Bank Bash. Now, Steven is creating a fund for Members facing emergency housing crises.

For 13 years, Steven experienced homelessness, sleeping most nights in a tent in the woods. During this time, he built a network of support in Chapel Hill, including local pastors, students at UNC, his CEF Advocates, his therapist at Freedom House, and many more. Surrounded by this supportive team, Steven’s work to build community and stability began to pay off.

In May 2017, Steven received a letter in response to his application for a Housing Choice Voucher. He was so nervous that he had his Advocate open the letter for him. The whole CEF lobby cheered when they read his acceptance letter! Just two weeks later, he was approved for his disability benefits. Steven describes it as surreal, “Pinch me to make sure I’m in the right century because it’s hard to believe this is actually moving forward!”

Now, having secured a multi-year lease in a comfortable basement apartment, Steven is settling into a new sense of security. “I don’t have to be concerned with where I am going to be anymore...where I’m going to lay my head.” To mark this monumental moment, Steven threw a housewarming party, and 30 of his friends and advocates joined to celebrate!
“It’s all about the relationships that I’ve built at CEF that help me focus on things in life that I know I am able to achieve — that always gives me that positive motivation.” — Earl

“To stay in housing and always have somewhere to stay — that’s my dream. To get somewhere, post up, and live a life like I deserve.” — Cynthia

Members Secured Over 144 JOBS

Members Moved Into 161 HOMES
“So truthfully, CEF is really about the first word in our name: Community. Something much more fundamental to all of us—it’s the foundation of our ability to connect and to collectively achieve these more tangible things, like jobs, and savings, and homes.”

If you want to know where the magic of CEF lives—the stuff that makes this funny place tick—it’s in the relationships and community that we find together.”

—CEF Co-Directors, 2017 TEDxUNC

Hear the full story at: www.communityef.org/tedx
Mussasa and Denise have restarted their lives again and again in the pursuit of a safe, stable home for their family—crossing borders, navigating isolation, and searching for new roots in community. They met in Burundi while fleeing their homes and the war in the Congo. They and their two sons lived as refugees in South Africa for 14 years with the hope of returning to the Congo. “I was so scared ‘cause I never thought of moving so far from home, but ... they said you don’t stand a chance of going back to your country.”

In 2016, they made the bold decision to move to Durham. Denise shares, “When we got here we didn’t know where to start, and transportation was a big problem.”

They heard about CEF from a friend, became Members, and started to save monthly in CEF’s matched Safe Savings Account for a car. Just when they reached their goal, Jim Kitchen (a CEF partner) surprised the family with a donated vehicle! “When you get a car, it changes your life,” Denise shares. “That is not just a car. It’s that kind of connection.”

Meanwhile, the couple worked with Advocates to find better jobs, and both have made incredible progress. Denise is a CNA working towards her nursing degree, while Mussasa works overnight as a welder and takes English classes during the day.

What do they see in their future? A home of their own— a dream not previously possible for them as a refugee family in South Africa. “I believe it’s better to work toward your own house than renting someone else’s...[CEF] continues to help me a lot, and from what we’ve done already, gives me new hope for the future.”
In our Chapel Hill Office CEF launched the Orange Community Hub to create a one-stop center for Members to access a wide range of supports. This year, the OC Hub gained incredible momentum! With the collaboration of 20+ partner agencies across our community, we expanded connections to critical services that had often been inaccessible to Members who most needed them.

What did the OC Hub mean for Fred? He had been living in the woods for 4 years. Within 2 months of joining CEF, Fred was able to connect to a wide range of healthcare, housing, and income services. Previously disconnected from services, he accessed them all through the OC Hub, where he worked with CEF Advocates that he had come to know and trust. He saw a doctor for the first time in 23 years; he quit smoking; he established ongoing support from veteran services; he obtained a birth certificate, social security card, and a bank account; and he gained access to overdue retirement benefits!

Moreover, Fred is one of hundreds of CEF Members who find belonging and connection in our beautifully welcoming community. Right before the holidays, Fred came by with a bouquet of flowers with this note: “Grateful: To CEF for all they have done for me, staff, and especially Advocates, thank you for the time and dedication that you give to everyone who is willing to participate.”
Members staying at Families Moving Forward (FMF), an emergency shelter in Durham, can meet on-site with CEF Advocates twice a week. This enables more time for families to focus on credit, budgeting, savings, and housing goals—and less time coordinating childcare and transportation to access services. In 2017:

- 92 current and former residents of FMF worked with CEF.
- 27 families opened Safe Savings Accounts.
- CEF and FMF partnered with Reinvestment Partners to offer homebuyer education to families moving out of shelter!
- CEF & FMF co-hosted Joy Shaver, a NC LiteracyCorps Member, to provide special support for this joint partnership!

Fun Fact: Since 2012, CEF has worked with Genesis Home & Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network—they joined forces in 2016 to become FMF!

“I’m learning money doesn’t have to dictate how I’m going to live my life. In the past, it was like I was working just to pay bills. But working with CEF, I’ve been seeing that I can pay myself, have money for bills, and still try to save something!” — Tamika
“When I come to CEF, I feel a relief — like the weight of the world off my shoulders. I’m in a place that is family where we all care about each other. I felt that from day one! I was in a dangerous and unhealthy place, but with CEF, the stress is gone and I feel great in my apartment.” — Tracey

*Tracey worked together with Hannah to resolve over 4 years of taxes and debt!*
Regina and her five kids’ lives changed rapidly with the onset of company layoffs, a serious illness, divorce, and loss of their home. Previously, she had built a stable career in military and corporate life. “Don’t ever think that you can’t ever be sitting in the bottom,” she shares.

Regina first met JV, her CEF Advocate, while she was staying at Families Moving Forward, an emergency shelter for families in Durham. Each meeting, she worked on new goals, from building savings and credit to pursuing housing stability and professional growth.

Now, just a year after joining CEF, Regina has rebuilt a professional life driven by passion. Earning certifications in wellness and recovery, she is now an independent recovery coach. She regularly connects her clients with CEF. “I’m a huge advocate! It’s like family … [and] a good connection for whatever you want to grow and be in life.”

Having found stability, Regina is finding ways to weave her success with that of her community’s, by creating job opportunities and leading community change. She founded a successful cleaning business that is dedicated to hiring single parents and people with a history of substance abuse or convictions. “We’re fighting the same fight,” she shares of her company’s four employees.

“While I connected with CEF, I was also able to take time not only letting my body heal, but letting my family heal. And through that, I gained a career that I love to death — or love to life!” — Regina

Regina also serves on the Board of Recovery Communities of Durham, volunteers as a youth mentor, and advocates for mental health policy and equitable wages. She knows first hand that “it’s good to be a part of that change!”
In 2017, CEF continued to grow the Unlocking Doors Initiative in Durham, an advocacy effort that mobilizes landlords and property managers to work with agencies and tenants to end homelessness. These efforts culminated in 150+ housing providers, tenants, elected officials, and community organizations attending the 2nd annual Mayor’s Landlord Roundtable. With Mayor Bill Bell’s invitation, landlords, organizations, and community members shared their experiences with one another and dreamt up solutions to the growing housing crisis.

To incentivize landlord partnership, we brought together seven agencies who provide direct supports to tenants, and raised and designed a $35,000 Risk Mitigation Fund pilot! To date, landlords representing 950+ units have pledged to say “yes” to households ending their homelessness in Durham! Find out more at unlockingdoorsdurham.org

To the tune of “Lean on Me”
Adapted Lyrics by Yvette Mathews

“Make room for us, so we can belong
To own or rent, here in Orange County
Oh, I would like to stay with my family
So we need housing

We are callin’ on ya brother, to help with the struggle
We all need somewhere to lay our heads
I just might have fixed income from retirement
We all need somewhere to lay our heads”

CEF Advocacy Choir singing at Financial Independence Day to advocate for affordable housing in our community.

*Special thanks to partners in this work: Ryan Fehrman, Mayor Steve Schewel, Terry Allebaugh, Durham Housing Authority, the Housing Results Team, and many more!
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