

BRANCHING OUT

GREATER MILWAUKEE
FOUNDATION

ACTS Housing

Funding needs include \$250 so ACTS can provide free homebuyer counseling for a prospective homeowner, \$1,000 for rehab staff to help a family reclaim a vandalized foreclosure and \$3,300 to sponsor a family's journey from renter to homeowner.



Francisco Hernandez, proud new homeowner, thanks to ACTS Housing

NONPROFIT RECLAIMS FORECLOSED PROPERTIES, REBUILDS MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY IN THE PROCESS

This past summer, as temperatures reached into the 90s and the humidity was just as high, Francisco Hernandez talked about the sweat equity he had poured and the investment he had made into his house over the past few months.

Every afternoon after work and on most Saturdays, he spent time at the little three bedroom, one bath house on West Orchard Street on Milwaukee's South Side. A new hot water heater, new drywall, copper wiring and ductwork had been added. Floors had yet to be installed, walls painted, bathroom and kitchen remodeled in the house, but to the Hernandez family, it's already home.

While he didn't downplay the work involved to move his family of five into their new home, he was quick to point out

who is responsible for helping them realize their dream of becoming homeowners: ACTS Housing.

"Becoming a homeowner is not easy here," said Hernandez, a native of Jalisco, Mexico who moved to the United States nine years ago. "The only thing I can say is that if it were not for the help that they gave us, I wouldn't have a house."

Since 1991, the nonprofit has helped 1,636 families like the Hernandezes purchase affordable homes in economically challenged neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The agency is known for representing families who face multiple barriers to owning their own homes and connecting them to foreclosed properties that have become a neighborhood burden. On average, families that work with ACTS earn less than \$34,000 annually and often do not have the credit history or funds necessary to buy a home.

Since 2008, when the foreclosure crisis started to ravage Milwaukee's neighborhoods, ACTS has returned more than 360 foreclosed homes to full occupancy. It does that

continued on pg. 2



Since 1992, through sales and rehab of homes, ACTS has guided \$106 million of investment in Milwaukee.

by providing a variety of services including homebuyer counseling and real estate brokerage services. Last year alone,

ACTS Housing (from page 1)

it helped 39 families purchase tax foreclosed properties, which was more than any other broker in Milwaukee. The city currently holds title to 1,072 tax foreclosed properties.

As ACTS specializes in foreclosures, many of which have been abandoned and vandalized, the selling price is considerably lower than traditional homes for sale. In 2012, ACTS sold 44 homes for less than \$5,000. The Hernandez home, which they purchased for \$3,500, sat vacant for nearly a year. During that time, much of the house's materials had been stolen and several windows broken. Knowing that challenge with such distressed properties, the agency also helps families find a contractor and often provides a rehab loan ranging from \$3,000 to \$5,000 to cover materials or labor.

"The toughest deals are the ones that we think are the most valuable," assistant director Michael Gosman said. "We are helping the family and helping the block." ■

Balance Inc.

Funding needs include \$250 for training for volunteer organizations and faith-based communities on how to include individuals with disabilities in community activities to \$1,000 for first month's rent, security deposit and furnishings to help an individual move into their first apartment.

NEW CENTER PROVIDES WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The need for support vs. the desire for independence.

Over the past two decades, Balance Inc. has worked with people with developmental disabilities and their families to strike a balance between those two. Its newest initiative, the Center for Community Supported Living, aims to further that goal and strengthen an individual's ability to determine how they live their life.

"A big part of the center is to encourage and provide support for people who want to make choices about their own services rather than someone else imposing the choice on them," said Craig Modahl, Balance's founder and executive director.

Modahl and his wife, Sandy, began Balance in 1991, initially serving two individuals with disabilities who were at risk of being institutionalized. Over the years, Balance has grown to serve 120 through a variety of programs including seven adult



Balance staff and clients of its new Center for Community Supported Living

family homes, a community-based adult day service program, a supported living program and a summer recreation program.

Despite those programs and other opportunities in the community, staff recognized gaps still existed in terms of available resources and education. The new center, which opened in July near downtown Grafton, aims to fill those holes. It features a computer resource center, kitchen,

Continued on pg. 3

Balance Inc. (from pg. 2)

gathering space, media center and a self-service coffee area. It's designed as a drop-in center and is open weekdays as well as evening and weekend hours. A host manages it and an advisory group of people with disabilities help shape the activities and programming.

The center was designed as a resource for people with disabilities but staff also see it as a place to educate and

provide assistance to family, caregivers and the community. To date, school districts and other nonprofits have been among the visitors.

"It is one of those things where you are directly helping the people with the disability but in essence you are also helping the family and the community by being able to provide all the support services," Modahl said. ■

Wisconsin Humane Society

Funding needs range from \$750 to cover the costs of five afternoons of door-to-door outreach, reaching more than 100 families and their pets, to \$5,000 to cover a month of comprehensive community outreach, including developing strategies to reach new clients, connecting clients to life-saving resources for their animals, and building relationships through door-to-door outreach, phone calls, and personal visits.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM PROVIDES ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE PET CARE TO UNDERSERVED AREA

The Wisconsin Humane Society has been in Milwaukee for more than 130 years. It's the most recognized shelter in the state, has one of the nation's largest wildlife rehab hospitals and each year provides critical medical care for 20,000 animals.

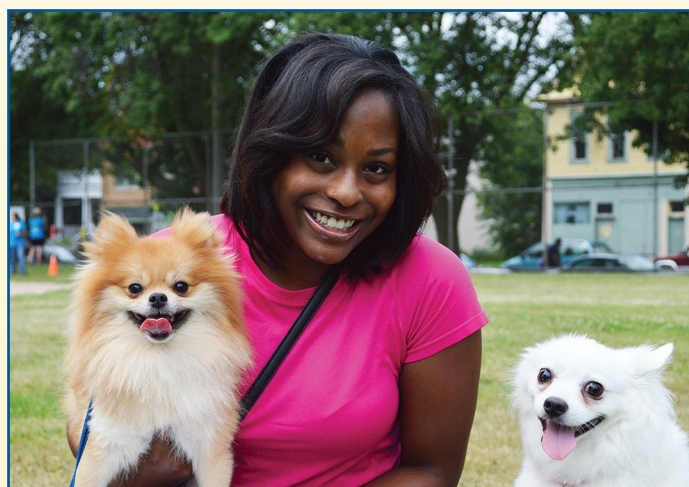
Yet less than three miles away from its doors, in the 53206 ZIP code, is an area with one of the city's highest rate of stray and impounded animals. An estimated 15,000 animals live within its boundaries, 90 percent of which have not been spayed nor neutered. No veterinary clinic exists there to address the need and only 5 percent of the nonprofit's clients for its low-income spay/neuter clinic come from that area.

Through a new community outreach program called Pets for Life, the nonprofit is working to bridge that gap, boost vaccination and spay/neuter rates and, as a result, become a trusted resource among area animal owners. Through door-to-door canvassing and outreach events, the program provides free vaccinations, spay/neuter surgeries, educational materials and other pet wellness resources such as leashes and collars.

"The whole program is a simple concept, but it is really effective," said Jill Kline, the agency's education and advocacy manager. "It's about building relationships and removing barriers to build sustainable change for animals and people of the community."

The agency was selected to operate the program in Milwaukee, through a partnership with the Humane Society of the United States and PetSmart Charities. The program also operates in Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

"The 53206 ZIP code stood out as one to us with immense




The Pets for Life program has reached out to hundreds of pet owners since beginning in 2012.

economic disadvantages," Kline said. "We saw the most need and population in that area."

While cost may be part of the reason for the high unaltered rates, Kline said lack of information and education are additional barriers. Since November 2012, a full-time community outreach coordinator and group of volunteers have tried to remedy that by spending four hours, twice a week, visiting neighborhoods. They share information on resources and services and address questions people might have about their animals.

Though it takes time to build relationships and trust among residents otherwise unfamiliar with the agency, staff have seen early victories. To date 730 people showed up at two outreach events and 354 spay/neuter surgeries have been conducted. One woman, whom the team met early on in their outreach, initially slammed the door upon their visit. Eight months later, she is the first to welcome volunteers as they pass through her neighborhood and she has since gotten her dog spayed. ■

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WHAT'S INSIDE



ACTS Housing pg.1

Nonprofit reclaims foreclosed properties, rebuilds Milwaukee community in the process



Balance Inc. pg.2

New center provides welcoming environment and support for people with developmental disabilities



Wisconsin Humane Society pg.3

Community outreach program provides accessible, affordable pet care to underserved area