

Dear Friends,

As 2017 begins, it's hard not to think about those people most affected by our ongoing housing crisis—working families, low-income seniors, people with special needs and those most at risk of homelessness. I hope that you will consider supporting RCD with a donation, so that this time next year, more people will be celebrating the new year in their own safe, affordable home and with access to services that will help them transform their lives.

One resident who will be happily ringing in 2017 is Althena.

Althena is a single mother who has always considered the Bay Area home. For years, she saw her rent increase faster than her paycheck. Every month, she saw less of that paycheck leftover for food, clothing, and transportation. She made the difficult choice to move in with family and friends in order to get back on her feet. Before she knew it, years had passed since she and her family had a place to call their own.

Althena learned about a new affordable housing development just after they had begun accepting applications. After applying, she thought a lot about Ashland Place. She thought about what it would mean to not only have her own place again but one that she could truly afford. She thought about what it would be like to have services on-site that would help her regain her footing and start her on a new path. And she thought about all the other applicants who must have been hoping and praying for the same. In fact, 2,381 applications were submitted for just 85 units. One day, Althena received the call she had been anxiously waiting for. The next day, she was handed a set of keys.

This was the beginning of a brand new chapter in Althena's life.

One of Althena's mottos is *"Don't be afraid to ask for help. And when you're offered help, don't be afraid to receive it."* Althena knows it takes courage to accept help. She knows that people dealing with housing instability pay a physical, mental and emotional toll. Althena and her son Edward were homeless for three years before moving into Ashland Place. She knows that you can get to a point where you feel your prayers are being overlooked, that you don't know if you can keep fighting. Althena, however, never gave up hope.

Because of you, Althena is not just surviving. She is thriving.

Althena's grandmother Mildred was the proprietor of Big M's Soul Food restaurants in Oakland and Berkeley. She taught Althena all about cooking and the logistics of running a business. For years, Althena delighted friends and family with her amazing homemade meals— shrimp and steak fries, greens, mac and cheese, and her famous cheddar biscuit bacon burger.

Now she is continuing the family tradition into her own microbusiness. With the help of RCD's resident services staff, Althena enrolled in a food entrepreneurship workshop and worked with The Eden Area Chamber of Commerce to acquire her cottage food operator license.



Althena
*Entrepreneur, mother, and
Ashland Place Resident*

Now she is sharing her specialties as a featured vendor at Eden Night Live, a community gathering of people in the Ashland area, featuring live music, children's activities, local businesses and artists.

Like his mom, Althena's son Edward is thriving too. Edward was taking several buses and BART in order to get to school. When he finally made it there, he struggled. Now he's one bus ride away and on the path to graduate from high school next spring. Edward takes advantage of many of the services offered by the REACH Ashland Youth Center next door to Ashland Place--help with homework, part-time job training and placement, and recreation.

Althena considers Ashland Place a safe space for her and her family and that living here has given her the chance to regain her foothold in her life. *"Even before I came to Ashland, I had a vision for my life. Living here has given me the opportunity to plant my feet and watch that vision grow. I feel like a tree that's just starting to bear fruit. I hope and pray that when I'm ripe, others will pick the fruit and plant their own trees."*

When you donate, you change the lives of residents like Althena and Edward. Your generosity creates and preserves housing that is safe, beautiful and affordable. You connect residents to services that ensure they stay in their homes, have access to health and wellness resources, develop economic resiliency, and foster educational goals. You help them to create communities that enrich lives. Communities that feel like home.

Three RCD communities are in construction right now. Stargell Commons will bring 32 family apartments to Alameda when it opens in April of next year. Major renovations to William Byron Rumford, Sr. Plaza in Berkeley will be completed in 2017. Work at Riviera Family Apartments in Walnut Creek just started and will offer 58 affordable units with easy access to downtown and transit. We are also continuing work on three exciting new developments. Embark Apartments in Oakland will provide 61 affordable apartments for veterans. Also in Oakland, Coliseum Place is located across from BART and is aiming for net zero energy consumption. And, St. Paul's Commons in Walnut Creek will be a mixed-use, transit-oriented development with 45 units of housing above a community serving space.

With your gift to RCD, you can **make sure that families like Althena's have assistance and resources to help them land on their feet** from the moment they get the keys to their new home.

With best wishes and many thanks for your commitment,

Dan Sawislak, Executive Director

P.S. Every donation helps to change the lives of people like Althena and Edward! To make a gift online today, visit <http://rcdhousing.org/support-rcd/>.