Kiesha Jones settled into her new home with her two sons in mid-June, but still wakes up in the morning and has to remind herself that she’s not dreaming. Her home is one of 18 built to jump-start the revitalization of Unity Park, a neighborhood just south of downtown Pontiac. Funding for these homes was part of a $13.9 million award to benefit Pontiac from the Department of Housing and Urban Development Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2 (NSP2). This program follows previous revitalization work in the neighborhood done by Lighthouse of Oakland County and Habitat for Humanity.

The developers gave new life to vacant properties by demolishing ruined structures, clearing overgrown foliage and creating affordable, upscale properties that matched the existing home-styles in the area. Community Housing Network (CHN) and Venture Inc. of the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA) partnered to build Jones’ home and 11 others, and Home Renewal Systems of Farmington Hills built the remaining six. CHN also created a community garden.

“If I had needed a new home five or 10 years ago, I would not have been comfortable here,” Jones remarked about the previously crime-ridden and blighted neighborhood, “but now Unity Park is more relaxed and quiet, and there is more of a sense of safety and security here.”

Kiesha first learned about the development program in a 2012 e-mail that was sent to her employer, Community Network Services. She exclaimed that the opportunity could not have come at a better time because she was looking to decrease her monthly payments and downsize from her rental home of 12 years. The NSP2 homes were created to be affordable for low-to moderate-income households.

She wanted to remain in Pontiac, where she has been a lifelong resident, but her main concern was finding a safe place for her children. Her youngest son, Jelani, 11, has nonverbal autism, and while he does not say in words how he feels, Kiesha has noticed that he runs around the house with excitement in his eyes, like he has discovered a brand new playground. “At first, he seemed confused that we weren’t leaving at the end of the day, but as the weeks went on I would see him running around and becoming more and more at-home,” she said. She also remarked on the newly-instilled sense of accomplishment that she shares with her 21-year-old son Paris.

One of her favorite aspects of the home, which is a 1,263-square foot barrier-free and fully-accessible ranch, is the window in her master bedroom that looks out to the backyard, where she can keep a watchful eye on Jelani while he plays outside.

Kiesha noted that the new homes have been a crucial tool in motivating existing Unity Park homeowners to increase
Community Housing Network is excited to announce an expansion to our work in Unity Park! We will construct 32 scattered-site, single family, lease-to-purchase homes in the eastern half of Unity Park, Pontiac. The targeted construction start is October 2013 with completion of all 32 homes, which will be available for residents of mixed income levels, slated for the fall of 2014. Two-, three- and four-bedroom homes will be available.

CHN is very aware of the need for affordable housing in the area. Before the early 2013 completion of the 24-unit Palmer Pointe Townhomes, we received more than 600 applications without even advertising the availability of the new units.

Funding for the $9 million Unity Park Rental development, just south of downtown Pontiac, is from a housing tax credit reservation through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

"This is the biggest project CHN has ever undertaken," says Kirsten Elliott, vice president of development. "This is a true community revitalization project, which will strengthen the fabric of the community, increase property values and will make a better community for the people we serve." Unity Park Rentals will reduce the vacant-parcel rate within the development's footprint by approximately one-third.

The development continues CHN's commitment to Unity Park following the collaboration with two partner agencies in building 18 new-construction homes, which provided homeownership opportunities, as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) 2. In addition, CHN created a community garden for the neighborhood.

Eight of the homes will be designated for supportive housing with supportive services coordinated by Community Housing Network. Three of the eight supportive homes will be fully accessible, while the remaining 24 will have accessible entrances.

Community revitalization activities to benefit all of the residents of Unity Park, such as the ongoing maintenance of the Community Garden, formation of Neighborhood Watch and block clubs, are being funded by PNC. A new community building will be constructed on Auburn Road as a part of the development. It will include the leasing office and community gathering space. The building will also house CHN's community revitalization coordinator and the supportive services coordinator for all of residents of Unity Park Rentals, and the property manager.
Join us October 10 at Bring it Home!
Together we will help those in need and hear from people who now have a place to call home

We look forward to spending the evening with you on October 10 from 6 to 9:30 p.m. at our annual signature fundraising dinner! Bring it Home, previously called Raise the Roof, will again be held at the beautiful Royal Park Hotel in downtown Rochester.

Please join us as we come together to help provide housing resources to people who are homeless, people with disabilities, people with low income, and other vulnerable residents of Southeastern Michigan. The focus of this year’s event will be the work of the Housing Resource Center, which last year took 14,699 phone calls from those in a housing crisis.

Guests at Bring it Home will enjoy a fun evening featuring networking, an open bar, a delicious sit-down dinner, the opportunity to bid on silent and live auction items, and more.

One of the highlights of our annual event is the presentation of the Emmett Jones Memorial Award honoring a person in one of CHN’s programs deserving recognition for hard work, perseverance and accomplishment. The award is given in honor of Emmett Jones, a CHN employee who worked in the Leasing Assistance Program, serving people who had been chronically homeless. Emmett brought a special kind of “tough love” to his work, and was influential in helping program participants meet their goals and stay the course, even in the face of enormous challenges. Emmett passed away in July 2010.

Our event is a heartwarming evening and last year raised more than $125,000 to help people in need find and maintain long-term, successful housing. Special thanks go to our generous sponsors and donors!

Tickets are $100 per person. Sponsorship opportunities are available at a number of levels. To purchase tickets or sponsorships, please contact Hailey Noonan at HNoonan@chninc.net or 248-824-7313.

Unity Park homeowner

their property values and revitalize their own living spaces, and she feels a responsibility to be a role model in the neighborhood.

“I think this is a huge to upgrade the neighborhood,” said Kermit Williams, Pontiac city councilman at the development’s open house. “It was good to see the other homeowners taking pride in upgrading their houses and painting and doing other things to keep up with the development.”

Glowing with the smile of a proud first-time homebuyer, Kiesha embodied the spirit of the Unity Park revitalization project.

“Pontiac is me. I’m not going anywhere.”
Dear friends,

The word "home" conjures up thoughts and memories. For many, we are able to say "welcome home" after giving people the resources to move from homelessness into housing, or into their first homeownership opportunity. It was very exciting to say "Welcome home!" to Kiesha Jones and the others who purchased homes in our Unity Park development. (See Page 1.)

There are others we work with to help them move into or stay in their homes. Two of those programs are our Homeownership Counseling program and Foreclosure Prevention program. This year we were excited to receive two state awards for these programs at the Building Michigan Communities conference in Lansing this spring.

MSHDA honored CHN as the Homeownership Counseling Program Agency of the Year and the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM) and AmeriCorps' Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Corps honored CHN as the Host Site of the Year.

Thank you for your continued partnership. Your support helps make "home" a reality for many.

Marc Craig
President