First-time homeowner kept purchase process a surprise

“I come home every day and thank God”

Isaac Sanders is 13, the age when smiling for a photo is difficult, but the corners of his mouth turn up faintly as his mom talks about surprising her family when telling them that their new home was one she bought.

When Saqura Sanders, a single mother of two sons, was given the keys at the closing, “I just cried because I couldn’t believe it was my home.” The second-grade teacher called her mom when she got into the car and then drove home to tell her sons. She, Isaac, her 16-year-old son Isaiah, and their 8-year-old turtle named Average Joe, moved in the day after the August 23 closing.

She was able to purchase the brick three-bedroom home in Macomb County through our Homeownership Program. The federally funded program, offered also in Oakland County, is designed to create affordable housing for low-to-moderate income households. Homebuyers receive down-payment assistance to make their mortgage more affordable, and the homes are sold at appraised value.

Her home, as all the others in the program, have undergone extensive rehab to address major maintenance concerns. The long-time renter says, “I kept praying, ‘Lord, I need a home that I can go in and won’t be as much maintenance when I first get there to help me grow in my finances and in being a homeowner!’”

She remembers walking through the home for the first time and saw the brand-new stove, refrigerator, microwave and dishwasher. When she was told they were all part of the purchase price, “I was shocked. And wow! There’s a new furnace, a new hot water tank and in the bathroom a brand-new tub and shower.”

The previous home they rented had maintenance problems she said were not addressed. “We were having a lot of mold issues. Our basement flooded four or five times. Sewage came up in our basement every time it rained”.

Saqura also started having respiratory issues because after working all day, she’d come home to study in the basement, working toward her master’s degree in special education at Marygrove College. She is proud of the fact she is the first person in her family to earn a college degree.

She is doing the same with her sons. “Education comes first, everything else is second. That makes you a well-rounded person. But it’s important for them to have good grades, be respectful and responsible, right boys?” “Yes,” they say in unison.

Both are involved in basketball. Isaiah, a junior at Cass Tech, is on the varsity basketball team, and Isaac plays basketball and is involved in math-based Academic Games. And as a family, they volunteer often through their church.

Both sons also say they appreciate how hard their mom worked to buy a home.

Saqura Sanders tries to coax a smile from Isaac, 13, as Isaiah, 16, watches in the new home their mother bought as a surprise for her family.

Continued on Page 2
New online tool provides housing choices

People looking for housing in specialized residential settings now can choose from an array of options with the launch of the Oakland Housing Link (OHL).

We collaborated with Oakland Community Health Network (OCHN) for the online tool providing improved choices for homes for people receiving services from OCHN.

“We’re thankful for CHN’s expertise in developing this valuable online tool to help the people we serve make informed decisions about where, and with whom, they want to live,” explains OCHN Executive Director and CEO Annette Downey. “It furthers our mission to empower people and strengthen communities, while promoting inclusion and self-determination for all.”

The Oakland Housing Link tool is accessible to network provider case managers and support coordinators to assist them in helping people they serve find housing availability of their own choosing. There are currently 216 homes on the site and OHL includes a photo of the home, a map, pertinent details, lists the service provider, the options of who the home can support (such as someone with a developmental disability or mental illness), whether the opening is for a private or shared bedroom, proximity to amenities such as a bus line, recreational facilities and more.

“OHL is centered around the individual receiving OCHN services and is paving the path for individuals to be in the driver’s seat of their housing choices,” says Shelley Brinkmann, our director of Property and Asset Management, who served as project manager on the creation of OHL. We post reported openings to the site Monday thru Friday. Individuals looking for housing have access to up-to-date information.

Katelyn Sanders and Beth Schindler are the OHL housing support brokers. Once the case managers and support coordinators find a sampling of homes on the site that may be of interest to those they serve, they get in touch with Katelyn and Beth. The housing support brokers can then provide information not available on the site.

The fourth member of the OHL team is Mark Voldeck, our ArcGIS Project analyst, who serves as the project analyst for OHL.

The response from those who have used the site since its October 1 launch has been overwhelmingly positive, say Beth and Katelyn.

Continued from Page 1

First-time Homeowner, Saquara Sanders

Saquara said the process to be a part of our HOME program was tedious at times as she gathered all of the required documents. But she adds that it was rewarding as well.

The required Homebuyer Education class was “an eye opener at my age. Looking at what was coming in, what was going out, in order for me to maintain and keep a home. That was very important and brought a new level to my thinking.”

Before purchasing her own home, she said, “It was hard to come home every day to something that you were paying rent for and paying the bills for and the home was having a lot of problems.” Now, “I come home every day and thank God for it. It’s a blessing to have a home.”
Jefferson Oaks

UnitedHealthcare gifts Welcome Home Baskets

UnitedHealthCare invested $14.6 million in Jefferson Oaks, the 60-new home community we are building in Oak Park, and recently contributed more when employees gathered to fill Welcome Home Baskets for the new residents. Jefferson Oaks features the adaptive reuse of the vacant Thomas Jefferson School building, including 20 one- and two-bedroom apartments and community space. The community also includes an additional 40 three- and four-bedroom town home-style units. Jefferson Oaks is a mixed-income community of high-quality residential homes, built and maintained to be appealing and affordable for hard-working families and individuals.

Dennis Mouras, CEO of UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Michigan, said people are often surprised that a health plan is investing in housing. “We do it because it’s our mission. Healthier lives make a health care system work better. And one of the things that we know is that people who have a nice home are healthier.”

UnitedHealthcare employees were joined by community leaders and project partners to assemble the baskets filled with basic household items such as dishes, cutting boards, utensils, cozy blankets, oven mitts, picture frames, hangars, laundry detergent and more, as well as healthy food items. After filling the baskets, there was a tour of the nearly completed development. As of late November, most of the homes are completed and occupied.

Holiday helpers

This year for the holidays we are collecting basic household necessities for those in our Adopt A Family program and others in our housing programs.

Items being collected include:
- dish soap
- kitchen sponges
- Kleenex
- toilet paper
- paper towels
- shampoo
- conditioner
- hand/bath soap
- shaving cream
- toothbrushes
- toothpaste
- household cleaners
- dental floss
- lotion
- razors
- deodorant
- household cleaners
- dish soap
- kitchen sponges
- Kleenex
- toilet paper
- paper towels
- shampoo
- conditioner
- hand/bath soap
- shaving cream
- toothbrushes
- toothpaste
- household cleaners
- dental floss
- lotion
- razors
- deodorant

For further information, please contact Tami Jelinek at Tjelinek@chninc.net or 248-824-7316 or visit the Adopt A Family page on our website, communityhousingnetwork.org.

Workplace honors

For the seventh year in a row, we have been named a Detroit Free Press Top Workplace! And for the fifth consecutive time, were named a Crain’s Cool Place to Work. If you, or someone you know, would be interested in being a part of our team, please check the Employment and Internship page on our website, www.communityhousingnetwork.org.
Integration has been one of our keystones since we began in 2001. The Oakland Housing Link provides an improved way of providing people seeking housing with more information and more choices. (Please see article on Page 2.)

Our collaboration with Oakland Community Health Network expands these options.

People can now look at a map and realize, "Wow, that home is close to my doctor's office" or see that a home with a vacancy is close to their place of employment.

The Oakland Housing Link is 100% person centered in terms of choice. People are able to work with their caseworker or housing support coordinator and see nearby amenities, the number of people who live in the home as well as a photo of the home.

While none of us are ever guaranteed being able to live exactly where we want, everyone appreciates the ability to make a choice.

The launch of the Oakland Housing Link was spearheaded by Shelley Brinkmann, our director of Property and Asset Management, and members of that department. Shelley is one of the original team members at CHN and this project helps bring into fulfillment our original vision for the Housing Resource Center to provide this service.

The Oakland Housing Link launch is just the first step, but a necessary one, to coincide with our philosophy on personal choice and integration based on the full knowledge of what is available.