

Helping a Special Family

December 2007

Many have come to know the Community Development Corporation of Utah (CDC) as a leading provider of affordable housing, but they may not realize the opportunities CDC has to help families in other ways. CDC, along with our valued and caring partners, recently assisted a very special family with their transition into a new home.

Troy and Diana Smith and their children, Samara (three) and Spencer (18 months), have been diligently searching for a house to call their own for quite awhile, but they were running into roadblocks at every turn. Diana and Spencer contend daily with Muscular Dystrophy, a hereditary muscle disease that causes progressive muscle weakness. The disease has made it necessary for Diana to spend most of her time in a wheelchair and her son often needs the assistance of a walker in order to ease the stress of walking. Therefore the need of wheelchair accessible housing was a priority for the Smith family, but its availability is scarce and often expensive.

One of the hurdles facing the Smiths in finding a home was income eligibility; in order for the Smiths to maintain their much needed disability benefits their income cannot exceed a certain level which inevitably leaves them on the short end of the debt-to-income scale. Therefore, to avoid disturbing their medical benefits they researched every conceivable alternative home purchase option including the programs available through CDC. Despite their efforts, each and every path to home purchase they pursued led them to a frustrating dead end. CDC's Stephanie Hanson, CDC Housing Counselor and Education Coordinator, explains:

“I worked with Diana on numerous occasions to explore every possible avenue of achieving homeownership without jeopardizing their benefits. We had some great ideas that continued to fall through. I spoke to many professionals about the fact that this wonderful family could not own a home of their own and be able to afford the modifications that would be needed, but no solutions were provided. Therefore, it was great to hear that at least our warehouse would be able to provide some assistance.”

The unexpected solution, at least for now, is a house that Diana's sister purchased and is renting to the Smiths. The home is a viable starting point for the Smiths that meets most of their immediate needs, but will require further work to make it possible for Diana and her son to get around. Various items in the home needed to be modified to better accommodate wheelchair access from room to room. CDC's Construction Manager, Jeff Hayden, surveyed the Smith's home and made suggestions as to what could be done to help make the home more accessible, including widening the doors and building ramps to the door entrances. Many others, including family and friends, have also been providing assistance in the effort to help the Smiths.

“We have been very fortunate to have so many people help us. Our family has helped us a lot with making the house easier to get around in. They tore out the carpet and put in hard-wood flooring. Our son Spencer was having a difficult time going against the carpet with his walker so the wood flooring has really been helpful. CDC's construction manager showed us how to widen the doorways to make them more accessible for my

wheelchair and plans are underway to replace our temporary ramp with a permanent cement ramp.”

CDC owns and operates an Affordability Project Warehouse and was able to draw upon the available items there to help with the needed modifications. The warehouse receives donations of quality home materials including, but not limited to, cabinets, doors, appliances, lumber, interior and exterior lights, and painting supplies. Donations come from building supply companies, homeowners, and contractors, and are put to use in our new construction and rehabilitation projects. Lowe’s Home Improvement Warehouse has been a particularly valuable partner and has



donated thousands of dollars worth of materials that have helped to make a difference in the lives of families in many of Utah’s communities including the Smiths. Additionally, this community-based warehouse periodically holds public sales to reduce inventory that is not used in CDC projects. For more information on the warehouse please contact CDC warehouse manager Jay Wilder Monday through Friday at (801) 487-6275.

For the Smiths, CDC donated four doors and one storm door along with a stove, and plans on donating rain gutters and also cement for a ramp that ASSIST plans to design and build. CDC will also provide the Smiths with a front door that has a large view window to help Diana safely see in and out. The CDC was able to supply these materials thanks to a generous grant from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) Foundation to help families in communities throughout Salt Lake Valley.

The Smiths are a very positive and friendly family with an optimistic outlook on life. It would be easy to give up and just accept defeat, but they remain determined to press on toward their dream of homeownership and still hope to find a way to purchase a home (possibly the one they are renting now) within the next two years. In the meantime, CDC will continue to help them when possible to make their house a comfortable and accessible place to live.

“We have been very pleased with all CDC has done for us and appreciate everyone’s help on our behalf.”