

THE VILLAGER

FALL 2024

First Step Creates Community and New Starts



Abril graduated from Florence Crittenton High School in May 2023. A few months later, Abril made two decisions that would set the next chapter of her life into motion - she ended a five-year relationship with the abusive father of her children, Reuben, 4, and Lenin, 3, and moved into Warren Village at First Step. "I could either stay with him and depend on him until my kids grew up, but I would never get my happy ending, or I could leave right now and we could try to co-parent," she remembers. Abril didn't want her kids to grow up with separated parents. She had experienced that as a child herself. But she had also watched her mother endure abuse from her father. The day she moved into First Step, she started to break the cycle of generational trauma and fear.

The First Step program is designed to meet the specific, and often very immediate, needs of young mothers. For Abril, First Step provides a community of support and resources. "Here I don't feel so alone, because everybody's kind of going through the same thing," she says. "We're all here because we don't have anywhere else to go. So it makes me feel like I'm being seen, and we can all be there for each other." This fall, First Step is expanding its program offerings and requirements to meet the ever-changing landscape of affordable and stable housing in Denver. Now First Step will include a wider array of enrichment services and career planning opportunities. These pathways include both education achievements and other economic mobility strategies, such as entrepreneurship, which recognize the diverse needs of the families we serve. Program Manager, Angelica Poventud, has seen firsthand how the program positively impacts the lives of residents. "Abril's situation underscores the importance of providing a supportive housing environment where residents can pursue economic stability and overcome systemic barriers," says Angelica. "Our mission is to offer families the resources they need to achieve economic mobility and disrupt cycles of poverty, ensuring that they can build secure and successful futures."

Since August 2023, Abril has accomplished an incredible list of things with the support of First Step staff. She received a restraining order against her abusive ex-boyfriend and officially began her journey as a single mom. She started therapy and began to navigate a diagnosis of PTSD. She received her Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), a key piece of information for an undocumented individual's path to citizenship. She enrolled in an esthetics program at Lash and Company Education with a full-ride scholarship from the Cielo Foundation to cover her entire program. Six months later, she completed the program and graduated with her esthetician certificate.



Abril proudly poses with her esthetician certificate

Continued on page 2.



"In my whole life, I never felt like I fit in because of my status and because of my looks, and for once I felt like I fit in [at esthetician school]," Abril reflects. "I was doing something for myself, the kids, and our future, and I was just so excited to learn and to be there." Abril is waiting for her U visa green card to arrive in the mail, a major milestone after living in the United States without documentation nearly her entire life. This marks the first time in Abril's life that she has legal status in the only country she has ever known. "It feels so surreal. It feels like I finally have a chance to start a life here, because I'm not scared anymore. I've wanted that security my whole life," says Abril.

What's next for this determined young woman? Abril was selected to receive one of First Step's two low-income housing vouchers. She is waiting for space to open up in one of her three preferred apartment buildings. She is excited to get her driver's license and to begin working as an esthetician this fall. First Step staff has supported Abril through every part of this journey, connecting her to vital resources like an immigration lawyer and nurturing her potential.

Today, Abril knows what it feels like to conquer her fears. She knows that she deserves to live without dread hanging over her. She knows what it feels like to have the support of a community behind her at First Step and to feel like she belongs no matter what she looks like or the status of her citizenship status, thanks to her classmates at Lash and Company Education. She is ready for her future.

Now I have security. That's what I wanted my whole life, and I thought that I only had it with the father of my kids. Then I came to First Step. Here, they made me push myself. I never thought I was capable of doing anything until I came here. Before this, I did not have a passport. I didn't have an ID. I didn't have the ITIN. I didn't have a bank account, my driver's license, or a car. When I came here, I had nothing.

Donor Spotlight: Tony and Yolanda Rainold



How did you first become involved with Warren Village?

We first learned of Warren Village when friends invited us to the Summer Garden Party about 15 years ago. We were impressed with the quality of the party and conversations with other guests who supported Warren Village. We concluded we should look into the organization.

Can you share a memorable experience you've had with our organization?

Touring the Gilpin facility was the first time we had made the effort to look into the inner workings of any nonprofit, and it got our attention that this nonprofit was really providing an important service.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background.

I made a voluntary move to Denver from New Orleans 34 years ago. I was 52 years old, and wanted to learn to ski, fly fish, hike, and bike – activities which I had not had time to do while working. Yolanda had moved here several years earlier. We met and married 15 wonderful years ago.

What causes are you most passionate about and why?

Recognizing the civic obligation to become charitable, we were faced with a myriad of choices. Our particular interest is in helping an organization which not only provides monetary support but also, and most importantly, works to assist individuals in improving their lives.

What insights would you give others who are considering supporting Warren Village?

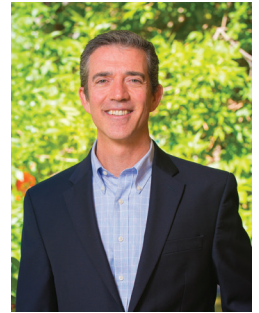
We think that Warren Village is an exemplary example of a nonprofit that supports individuals as they improve their lives, because it not only nurtures the parent but also the family and children. I am particularly impressed with the President & CEO Ethan Hemming because of his tireless work in expanding the services which Warren Village is able to offer. He is an inspiration to donors such as us.



The Power of Generosity, Gratitude, and Community

From Our President & CEO

Welcome to the Fall 2024 edition of the Villager! It's an exciting time here at Warren Village and we have much to celebrate. Over the past few months, we've made tremendous strides in our mission to support single-parent families, and inside this edition, we are excited to share some of the high-lights with you.



Our 2024 Aspire Gala was an incredible success, raising over \$350,000 to further our work. The evening was made even more memorable by Lauren McCoy, a program alumna, who delivered a heartwarming and powerful speech about overcoming great challenges to support herself and her daughter. Today, Lauren is the Assistant Principal of Aurora Science and Technology Middle School—a testament to the life-changing impact of Warren Village. A special thanks to our Aspire Gala Anniversary Sponsor, United Airlines, and to all our wonderful sponsors for making the night possible!

We are also thrilled to announce that the first residents at Warren Village at Alameda will begin moving in during the month of November. This expansion marks a significant milestone in our efforts toward addressing the urgent need for affordable housing in Denver.

Additionally, our First Step program is expanding to better meet the ever-changing needs of Denver residents. This expansion includes modifying our program and its requirements, enabling us to provide critical support and resources to even more families as they work toward a brighter future.

Our overwhelmingly successful Family Nights provided fun, great food, and activities for our resident parents and children. We are grateful to our community partners, including United Airlines, Saunders Construction, BMO Financial Group, Wells Fargo Bank, Viega LLC, Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation, Liberty Media, Delta Dental, and the Colorado Health Foundation, and many others. Their generosity helped create joyful memories for the families we serve.

We look forward with joy and anticipation and extend a sincere thank you for your continued support as we grow and serve even more of our incredible community!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ethan Hemming".

Ethan Hemming, President & CEO

A New Look for Warren Village



As you look through this issue of The Villager, you may notice something new - a fresh look for Warren Village. This fall, we are thrilled to unveil a rebrand for Warren Village with our new logo and tagline. This rebrand has been in the works for a number of years and has truly been a community-led process.

We engaged our staff, donors, community experts, and, most importantly, our residents and alumni to help identify the most meaningful and honest representation of our community.

Our new logo showcases Warren Village's primary service of affordable, supportive, and safe housing for families. It features a parent and child created with arrows to represent upward mobility and demonstrates our focus on serving primarily single-parent families.

Our new tagline - Where Families Flourish - highlights the power and strength of our families and the action they take to change their lives while living at Warren Village.

We are excited to take this new look that defines the Warren Village community into the future as we continue to serve families in Denver.

Warren Village at Alameda Updates



Meet Shambre Sena-Wright

Shambre Sena-Wright is the new Director of the Mile High United Way Early Learning Center at Warren Village at Alameda. She grew up in southwest Denver and is a single mother with over 18 years of experience in education. Shambre is passionate about the power of the two-generation model and looks forward to strengthening and positively empowering families to transform their trajectories by ensuring the student experience is exceptional at the Early Learning Center.

Shambre is most excited about returning to a community she cherishes, practicing her Spanish skills, and creating deep relationships with families to pay homage to their rich cultural traditions, while helping the teachers learn how to best serve the children. She hopes parents will feel comfortable approaching her with ideas and feedback regularly and plans to work intensely to ensure the Early Learning Center is aware of, and meeting each child's needs. It is her honor to have this opportunity to learn and grow along with the children, their families, and her new staff!

Building Updates

Building progress moved along at a good pace this fall. In September, appliances were on hand and ready to be installed and resident apartments were nearing completion. Exterior painting was well underway, and plans progressed for four beautiful murals that will create a sense of community.

October was an exciting month at Alameda. The south building neared completion, and families will begin moving in during the month of November. We can't wait to share the stories of these special families in the coming months. Construction crews are still hard at work to complete the second building by December and the Early Learning Center is expected to open in late January 2025.



From left to right: A completed kitchen in an apartment; a view into the neighborhood from a corner apartment; a full bathroom in an apartment; a view from the playground of one of the Early Learning Center classroom windows, each of which has its own unique color.

Community Partnerships

We're not doing this alone. Warren Village at Alameda is a collaborative effort, made possible with partners like Denver Housing Authority, who provided the land, development support from Urban Ventures, and property management strength from Rocky Mountain Communities. This blend of city, state, and federal funding combined with community, foundation, and corporate donations brings this dream to life. We are eager to continue this theme of partnership with our many amazing neighbors and organizations in southwest Denver. Our incredible community of support has made it possible to expand assistance for families in southwest Denver, connecting future residents with the resources they need to thrive.

Aspire Gala 2024



Photos by FocusTree Photography

On September 14, 2024, the Warren Village community came together at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts Seawell Ballroom for the 50th Anniversary Aspire Gala, presented by United Airlines. During the evening, we reflected on the past, celebrated the present, and looked toward the future. The power of collective giving was on full display, and with incredible support, we raised over \$350,000!



We were honored to have Lauren McCoy as our keynote speaker. In 2008, Lauren was a year away from college graduation. "I was nine months pregnant, alone, and overwhelmed," Lauren told guests. "One day, while sitting in class on the brink of despair, a friend mentioned Warren Village. It sounded too good to be true—a place that could support me in finishing my special education degree while raising my baby."



Lauren shared, "Warren Village wasn't just a home; it became a lifeline. Warren Village was more than just a roof over our heads; it was a sanctuary that offered us stability, essential resources, and the unwavering support I needed to grow as a parent and an individual. By 2015, I achieved one of my greatest dreams: purchasing a home for Lanaya and me. What once seemed like an impossible dream became a reality- we were truly on our way. Today, I am deeply honored to serve as the Assistant Principal of Aurora Science and Technology Middle School, a role that allows me to give back and make a difference in the lives of others."

Thank you to everyone who attended this year's Aspire Gala, and to everyone who we missed at our glittering night, we will see you at the next one!



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Family Nights at Gilpin and First Step

Warren Village Family Nights offer a unique opportunity for parents to unwind with their children and neighbors while enjoying quality time together. These events hold significant value to residents, as community partners generously provide meals and activities. Families experience firsthand the support and care that the community has for them.

This year, Family Nights were packed with face painting, bubbles, dance parties, crafts, games, and lots of new memories. Families enjoyed pizza, build-your-own-burrito bars, salads, ice pops, and cookies. We held seven Family Nights at the Gilpin Campus and two Family Nights at the First Step Campus. Over 150 families attended for dinner and community time.

Thank you to our 2024 Family Night Sponsors: United Airlines, Saunders Construction, BMO Financial Group, Wells Fargo Bank, Viega LLC, Insurance Industry Charitable Foundation, Liberty Media, Delta Dental, and the Colorado Health Foundation.

If your company or community group is interested in hosting a Family Night in 2025, please reach out to Shardai Perry-Miller, Community Engagement Coordinator, at sperry-miller@warrenvillage.org or 303.320.5032.



Connections Breakfast Series



In August, we held another Connections Breakfast Series: Mental Health Supports and Resources. Lorez Meinhold, founder and Executive Director of the Caring for Denver Foundation, joined us to share her insights on the importance of community in mental health supportive services.



Speaking to the heart of Caring for Denver Foundation's mission, Lorez said, "One of the things that we are required to do, that is the essence of what we do, is listen to community. We all come to this issue [of mental health] with expertise. We all have lenses, we all have biases, and so how do we really listen to what is the right solution for community? We have a tendency to say, 'Hey, this is the problem, so therefore this is the solution.' And we really wanted to approach it differently, and say, 'Hey, this is the problem. How do you want to show up and help us figure out what that solution might be for that community that you're working with?' Show us how you're trusted by that community. Show us you're really going to listen to and evolve that program with the community you're serving." We are grateful to Caring for Denver Foundation for their generous support of Warren Village.

Thanks to everyone who attended and engaged in conversation. It was truly a chance to connect as a community while enjoying a delicious breakfast.

Warren Village Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Updates

The Warren Village Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) is excited to share our ongoing initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of our community. Our commitment to fostering an inclusive environment is stronger than ever.

Here are some key areas of work:

Language Access Plan and Policy: We are developing a Language Access Plan to ensure families can engage fully in programs and services. This plan will enhance communication with our diverse community through translation and interpretation support.

DEI Strategic Plan and Framework: A DEI Strategic Plan is being created to guide our efforts in promoting equity and inclusion. This framework will outline actionable steps to address the unique challenges our residents face, ensuring everyone feels valued.

Organizational Agreements: We have developed and are beginning to roll out Organizational Agreements to foster a culture of transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement, emphasizing inclusivity and collective well-being and growth.

Staff Resources and Library: We are establishing a staff resource library focused on leadership, team building, social justice topics, and other professional development, providing valuable materials for our staff.

Resident-Alumni Advisory Council: We are in the pre-planning stages of forming a Resident-Alumni Advisory Council to help shape organizational initiatives. We are still in the incubation stage, so please stay tuned.



The Staff Resource Library

Together, these efforts will strengthen our work alongside parents, residents and community, as well as reinforce an environment of belonging and inclusion at Warren Village.



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