INVESTING IN DREAMS

by Joshua Chittum,
Children’s Program Manager

Though there are similarities among Community LINC program participants, they are far from a homogenous group. They are individuals and families possessing unique sets of skills, beliefs, strengths, dreams and burdens. Our standard services lead to permanent housing for most of these families no matter the circumstances. Many families may need a little extra push to open doors and once opened, they are able to achieve their goals. However, a small subset of families are carrying such a weight in their invisible luggage that significant amounts of staff time and agency resources are required to simply get the family back onto a healthy path, much less to the end of the road.

As Kansas City implements a new coordinated entry system to screen and place families experiencing homelessness, Community LINC will work with more and more families in these desperate situations. This means higher inputs are required from the agency. One family can dominate several staff members’ time for an entire week as they accompany moms, dads and children up the mountain of their daily goals. Goals for next week, or even tomorrow, cannot yet be identified.

Imagine, for example, a mother in poor physical health and mounting mental health issues within an overburdened mental health system. Her youngest daughter also faces physical health problems and is bullied at school. Her oldest son is diagnosed with multiple mental illnesses and is constantly suspended from school, while the school struggles to test him for Special Education services because he has missed so many hours of academic instruction.

Due to a series of events over the course of years, including a family death, the mother and her children once called a hotel their home. They were forced to leave after the son caused extensive property damage, which the mother could not pay to fix. They next moved to a shelter and that is when mom’s depression hit hardest. She lost employment. Soon after, the family was asked to vacate because the son continued to get into fights with other children. Their next stop was Community LINC.

The family needed stable housing to begin healing, but could not find stable housing without healing. This is the impossible scenario many families face. The struggles accumulate. Bridges are burned. Dreams are not deferred, but die in the minds of those who once kept them alive.

It is nearly impossible for humans to add new goals like finding employment or securing a stable address when dreams have died. It takes an extended amount of time for the flood levels of stress to recede so the mind can focus on new endeavors and build on the inherent resilience the family has demonstrated by continuing to survive.

Hope and faith are strong forces in situations such as these, but it’s worth making tangible investments too. Your support of Community LINC helps families dream again and begin taking steps toward turning those dreams into reality.
Community LINC is incredibly excited to support an up and coming Kansas City musician, Crystal Rose. This partnership is particularly special because Crystal experienced many of the obstacles our children face when she was growing up. Crystal persevered and now is making her dream a reality.

Crystal, a singer-songwriter, moved frequently and finally landed in Kansas City, the place she calls home, in 2013. She has already released a single and is preparing to kick off a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to record her first EP (extended play record). Crystal has committed a portion of the campaign proceeds to Community LINC because she shares our passion to end family homelessness and transform lives. Crystal says there are many kinds of dreamers out there and she always wants to be the kind of person who encourages others to dream.

Crystal has been blessed to grace some incredible stages in Kansas City and surrounding areas and played festivals alongside amazing artists like George Clinton, Local Natives, De La Soul and Talib Kwali. You will be in awe of this amazing young lady and her determination to forge her own future. You’ll be hearing more about Crystal as she launches her crowdfunding campaign and shares the details of her journey.

Music is a huge passion of mine and has always been, but it wasn’t always the dream. You see, I grew up in poverty, in a single parent household with seven siblings, and relatives in and out. There was lots of instability and abuse and we always had a shortage of necessities and the things we needed as children, like a home, food, encouragement and lots of love. Kids should be dreaming of dinosaurs, princesses, saving the world, loving people, and inventing the greatest thing ever, but when I was growing up my dreams were so small. I dreamed about what and if I was going to eat or where I would sleep without a predator attacking. There were many times when we didn’t have utilities and would walk miles to laundromats to fill up empty 2-liter bottles just so we could have drinking water.

Thankfully, my story changed and that is why I am here today. When I look back, I realize it took me over 20 years to start dreaming big because I lacked the basic necessities every child should have. I don’t want to see other kids waiting that long to dream BIG because of circumstances they have absolutely no control over.

I chose to work with Community LINC because of their mission. Community LINC is a nonprofit in the heart of KC that is ending homelessness for struggling kids and families. They’re impacting the lives of hundreds of children who faced the same struggles I did when I was young. On the surface, it may seem like these kids are just getting clothed and fed, but really, they are being given an opportunity to look beyond survival mode and dream again, to dream BIG and bigger than their circumstance.

Are you a young Kansas City professional looking for a way to make a difference in your city? The Community LINC Young Professionals are striving to do just that. The group is working to educate themselves and others about homelessness, volunteering their time in service activities and planning fundraising, networking and social events. All while practicing their networking skills.

The mission of the Young Professionals Board is to engage, empower and educate future young leaders about the challenges facing homeless families.

Join us!
If you are interested in professional networking and volunteer opportunities, please contact the Community LINC Young Professionals Board Membership Chair, Emily Barnes, yabcommunitylinc@gmail.com.

For more information about upcoming social and service events, follow them on Facebook: @communityLINCYP.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN ACTION
Community LINC’s Young Professionals participated in a recent Family Resource Night held on campus. The group prepared and served the evening meal for Community LINC’s families and supervised children’s activities.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS BOARD
We are eagerly anticipating the 2017 Rent Party, “Opening Doors.” This fun-filled evening at the Westin Crown Center Hotel will offer cocktails, enticing live and silent auction items and a fabulous dinner followed by dancing. Community LINC will present the Karen and Hank Herrmann Humanitarian Award to CEO and Chairman of Polsinelli, W. Russell Welsh. Rent parties began in 1920’s Harlem when neighbors hosted Saturday night parties to celebrate life and help those struggling to pay their rent. Your contribution to the Rent Party will help ensure that we can pay the rent and assist homeless families who are trying to regain stability.

Each year, more than 600 guests join us for an unforgettable evening and raise funds to stabilize, rehouse and empower homeless families. Specifically, funds will help homeless families and their children find permanent housing and develop the skills to stay there!

We are thrilled to have Roshann Parris and Jeff Dobb serve as 2017 Rent Party Chairs. The philanthropic efforts and civic leadership of our honored guests have had a significant impact in the Kansas City community.

The 2017 Rent Party will be hosted at the Westin Crown Center Hotel on October 7, 2017.

For more information, visit www.communitylinc.org/rent-party.html

**FLASBACK TO 2016**

Heads, I win! Tails, you win! Guests take part in the Head or Tails game to win unique prizes.


Lisa & John Armour, Patricia & Larnell Smith, Erin & Jason Perez

Roshann Parris & Jeff Dobb
2017 Rent Party Chairs

**LIVE AUCTION SNEAK PEEK**

**Vintage Buddy Scooter**
Don’t let this vintage look fool you! Love is in the details. This vintage-inspired scooter comes in a variety of retro colors, yet has plenty of modern features that include: under seat storage, charger for your cell phone, and a grocery hook. This Buddy 50 Scooter is great for everyday transportation. You’ll spend less time at the pump and more time scooting around and falling in love.

**Willamette Valley Luxury Getaway**
Need to get away from it all for a weekend? Head out to Oregon Wine Country for beautiful vineyards, views and wine. Your trip includes two nights at the luxury Allison Inn and Spa, a private tour with resident expert Chris Katlin and a tasting at Willamette Valley Vineyards Plus, enjoy a case of wine to take home the night of the Rent Party event. This exclusive experience for two include airlines miles to help get you there and back.

**Simply Lobster**
Enjoy a New England Lobster Feast at your private residence for 20 people. This dinner includes lobster, steamed red potatoes, fresh corn on the cob, rolls and butter, and fresh strawberry shortcake. Everything is provided and best of all, there is no clean up or set up on your behalf. All you have to do is gather 20 friends, set the table and enjoy the night!

For more information, visit www.communitylinc.org/rent-party.html
**FULL CIRCLE**

As a child, Tiffany loved the stories her grandmother would tell her about serving families experiencing homelessness at Community LINC. Tiffany’s grandmother was Florence Maines who volunteered at Community LINC for over a decade. Florence’s passion was contagious, so much so that her granddaughter, Tiffany, carried the impact of the stories with her well into adulthood. When Tiffany finished college and began her career at American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC), she would often think about Community LINC and her grandmother’s devotion to serving those experiencing homelessness.

In January of 2017, Community LINC was announced as the non-profit beneficiary of the AAPC of Kansas City. In August, we were invited to join the AAPC at their annual coder’s conference at the Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center. There, we were able to mix and mingle with hundreds of medical coders from across the Kansas City metro area. We spent the better part of a day sharing our mission and opportunities for involvement with attendees. At the end of the conference, the AAPC of Kansas City took a collection to benefit Community LINC. The attendees gave generously, with funds raised surpassing the AAPC’s goal of $5,000!

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**SCHOOL SUPPLY DONATION**

On August 8, during our Community Resource Fair, more than forty children lined up with anticipation and excitement as they received school supplies for the coming year. Words cannot express the looks on kids’ faces as they selected their backpacks, folders, and pencils. This basic need can be a point of stress for families experiencing homelessness. This anxiety was relieved thanks to the generosity of some of our most faithful supporters from Unity Church of Overland Park.

For over 20 years, Community LINC has been blessed by a partnership with Unity Church of Overland Park. Unity members have a passion for helping children in poverty. As parents, they understand the importance of equipping a child with necessities for the first day of school. Unity members generously donate backpacks and supplies for hundreds of children each year. The children at Community LINC are fortunate to have repeatedly benefitted from this generosity.

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**IN-KIND NEEDS**

- Twin and Queen Size Beds
- Basic cleaning supplies
- Microwaves

**VOLUNTEER NEEDS**

Rent Party Volunteers: Be part of the fun and help us make our annual event a success. For more information, visit [http://communitylinc.org/rent-party-volunteer](http://communitylinc.org/rent-party-volunteer)

Ambassadors: Help us spread the word about Community LINC by inviting others to our Way Home Tours held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month at 4:00 PM. RSVP: [www.communitylinc.org/way-home-tours.html](http://www.communitylinc.org/way-home-tours.html)

Children’s Program Volunteers: Help Community LINC children improve their resilience during our Children’s program on Tuesday evenings at 5:30 PM. This is an opportunity to form a positive relationship with children and help them improve their emotional and social well-being.

Program night food provider: Provide a meal once a month for our families during Tuesday program nights.

Maintenance: Good with a hammer or paintbrush? Have a few spare hours during the week? We have plenty of projects to keep you busy.