

Below Level Differentiation

■ Reading and Discussion Tips:

- Before going over the fact sheet on Day 1, ensure that students understand relevant terms such as *cost burdened*, *minimum wage*, *slum*, *refugee*, and *wealth*. Define these concepts and show how they relate to conditions of poverty and affordable housing.
- For homework on Day 1, assign students one article to read rather than two.
- Before Day 2, explore the Habitat for Humanity website and find photographs of Habitat homes from various locations around the world (see <http://www.habitat.org/how/whatlikeintl.aspx>). As you discuss differences in housing needs worldwide on Day 2, show these photos on a projector to demonstrate clearly how the physical aspects of housing change from region to region.

■ Activity Tips:

- Do not require students to access each others' blogs for homework prior to Day 3. Instead, ask students to print out a copy of their blog entry and bring it to class. Allow students to spend class time passing around their blog entries for others to read. Rather than discussing the blogs in pairs, students may write comments or questions about each blog on the back of the sheet of paper.
- Require three blog entries per group instead of four (using your discretion to choose which role to eliminate). Then, instead of assigning a single group member to write each entry alone, allow groups to collaborate in writing all three entries.

■ Assessment Tips:

- If you chose to allow groups to work together in writing the blog, adjust the rubric so that group members receive a group grade. Replace "Blog cohesiveness" with a collaboration rating of how well group members worked together, based on your observations during the time they had to plan their blog strategy on Day 2.

Above Level Differentiation

■ Reading and Discussion Tips:

- Pick student leaders to guide the discussion on "The Need for Housing: Get the Facts." Provide these students with the fact sheet prior to the day of the lesson. Instead of asking the discussion questions outlined in the lesson plan, have the student leaders generate questions and lead the class in conversation.
- Challenge students to learn more about the types of homes that can be found around the world. Refer students to the home examples listed at <http://www.habitat.org/how/whatlikeintl.aspx> as a place to start. Have students choose three types of international home construction and write a report describing each of them and how they cater specifically to their environment.

■ Activity Tips:

- Have students write more than one blog entry in the voice of their chosen role. Ask all group members to write two entries apiece: one entry giving perspective on their life before the Habitat for Humanity build, and one describing life after. For the student writing as a Habitat volunteer, the first entry should focus on the technical aspects of the build while the second reflects on the emotional or personal experience of being a volunteer.

■ Optional Extension Tips:

- After students have had time to comment on their class members' blogs, have each student select a question or issue raised in one of the comments that he or she finds particularly interesting. Have students write a 1–2 page personal reflection on this topic. The reflection should demonstrate thoughtful insight on the question or issue itself and should also include a personal section on why the student found this specific subject especially engaging.

Grades 9–12

Objectives

Students will:

- learn about how Habitat for Humanity works to help families achieve decent and affordable housing.
- read about different families from around the world and how housing challenges differ depending on a family's culture and geographical location.
- create a group blog and write creative and informative entries in the voice of fictional Habitat for Humanity project homeowners and volunteers.
- use skills of collaboration and cooperation to work in groups.

Educational Standards

Common Core State Standards

Literacy in History/Social Studies

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

National Geography Standards

- Understand how culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.
- Understand the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface.

National U.S. History Standards

- Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States.

Scope

- 3 class periods (45 minutes each)

Materials

- Access to the Internet for student use (day 2)
- **Fact Sheet:** The Need for Housing: Get the Facts
- **Interview:** A Conversation with Temir Atyabayev
- **Article:** Making a Living Then, Making a Life Now
- **Article:** Learning Lessons
- **Teacher Resource:** Blog Rubric

Lesson Plan

In this lesson, students will learn about families who have worked with Habitat for Humanity to attain safe and affordable housing. Students will read articles and interviews about the lives of three different families around the world and the hardships they faced. Students will discover how having a Habitat home has improved their lives. Besides educating students on Habitat for Humanity's projects, this lesson will emphasize the comparative housing needs and challenges of different world areas. Finally, students will collaborate to create and post blog entries about a fictional Habitat for Humanity project in a different country.

■ Preparation:

Before beginning the lesson:

- Make copies of the articles, fact sheet, and interview.
- As part of their homework, have students familiarize themselves with Habitat for Humanity and its goals by taking the online "Quick Tour" at http://www.habitat.org/quicktour/0_welcome.htm.

■ Procedure:

Day 1 Distribute and discuss the "The Need for Housing: Get the Facts" fact sheet. Distribute and discuss "A Conversation with Temir Atyabayev."

1. Hand out copies of "The Need for Housing: Get the Facts" and give students time to read the information.

- Ask students: According to the article, what are some possible negative effects of being a "cost burdened" family? How might children be affected? What is the relationship between decent, affordable housing and a community's local economy? Why do you think that this relationship exists?

- Encourage students to integrate the information from the fact sheet with what they learned about Habitat for Humanity from browsing the website and taking the “Quick Tour.” Emphasize that the benefit of a Habitat for Humanity building project extends beyond making a family more physically comfortable at home; providing proper housing can positively affect many aspects of Habitat homeowners’ lives, from their ability to acquire more wealth to their children’s academic achievement.

2. Hand out copies of “A Conversation with Temir Atyabayev.” Have students take turns reading the interview aloud.

- Ask students to consider how Atyabayev’s story exemplifies what they have learned about Habitat for Humanity’s purpose and the benefits of decent housing.
 - What problems did Atyabayev and his family face before they sought aid from Habitat for Humanity? How did attaining decent housing help address these problems?
 - How does Atyabayev’s story demonstrate that decent housing can improve the health of families and strengthen their bonds?

3. Pass out the articles “Making a Living Then, Making a Life Now” and “Learning lessons” and ask students to read them for homework.

After reading each article, students should write short responses to the following questions: How were the challenges of the family or families in this article different from the challenges faced by Atyabayev’s family? What similarities do you see between the two situations?

Day 2 Discuss student responses to the assigned reading. Introduce blog project and give students time to begin working.

1. Ask students to share their responses to the two family profiles they read for homework.

- Encourage students to consider how geographic location can affect housing needs. Ask students: How was each family’s housing situation affected or determined by geographical or cultural factors, such as climate, political unrest, or their country’s history?
- Ask students to think about why affiliate offices are important to Habitat for Humanity’s success. Remind students that different areas in the globe have very different cultural housing practices and therefore

have different needs. Why is it beneficial to have local community members, familiar with the country’s climate and culture, organizing and working on the Habitat projects in their area?

2. Introduce the blog project. Divide students into five groups.

- Ask each group to choose one of the following Habitat for Humanity international project locations:
 - Kenya (see http://www.habitat.org/hw/decent_housing/All_for_a_purpose.aspx#P0_0)
 - Armenia (see http://www.habitat.org/hw/decent_housing/Keeping_the_Faith_in_Armenia.aspx#P0_0)
 - Honduras (see <http://www.habitat.org/intl/lac/90.aspx>)
 - Lesotho (see http://www.habitat.org/hw/decent_housing/Looking_after_the_least_of_these.aspx#P0_0)
 - Thailand (see http://www.habitat.org/hw/decent_housing/thailand_transformation.aspx#P0_0)
- Inform students that they will be creating a group blog featuring a Habitat Homeowner family from their chosen country. Each group will write entries for this blog in the voices of members of a fictional Habitat for Humanity project. To prepare for the project, using the Habitat for Humanity websites above, each group should agree upon a plausible profile of a family residing in their chosen country.
- Each member of each group should select one of the following roles:
 - The homeowner
 - A teenage/young adult member of the homeowner family
 - A young child member of the homeowner family
 - A Habitat for Humanity volunteer who worked with the family
- Each group member should compose a 300-400 word blog entry written from the perspective of their selected role. Blog entries should be composed in the style of a reflective essay, but should include some personal detail and have a more intimate tone, similar to a diary. Students should strive to speak convincingly in the voice of their character. Entries should be creative and should portray the fictional character with respect and empathy. Each entry should answer the following questions:
 - What is your name, and what is your daily life like?
 - What housing problem did your family face, and how did it affect you personally?

- What was it like working with Habitat for Humanity?
- In what ways has your life changed since you worked with Habitat for Humanity?

Note: for the student writing from the perspective of the Habitat volunteer, these questions should be answered from an outside viewpoint (e.g., What is daily life like for the average family in the community in which you work? How do you see housing problems affecting these families? Instead of “What was it like working with Habitat?” describe the building experience: What building materials and tasks were unique to this environment?)

- Explain that after each student has composed a blog entry, he or she should access the group blog and upload it to the website. The final blog should display entries by all group members and should demonstrate that the group has an in-depth understanding of both HFH’s process and the chosen “family’s” specific situation (based on research on the home country). Assign a deadline for when student blog entries must be posted to the group blog.

3. Give students the remainder of the class period to meet with their groups. At this time, groups should use the Internet to research their country and decide on specific characteristics and a fictional family history for their hypothetical family.

- For homework, ask groups to elect one person to create a blog account on blogger.com. This student should access blogger.com and click “Create an Account.” This student should use an e-mail address and password for the account that he or she will be comfortable sharing with group members. The title of the blog as well as the blog URL should be “Our Fictional Housing Project in [country name].”

Day 3 Students meet in groups to compare blogs. Discuss the blog project.

- 1. Let a few days pass between Day 2 and Day 3. For homework the night before Day 3, ask each student group to pair up with one other group and exchange blog URLs. Each group should visit and read their partner group’s blog. Students should pay special attention to the partner entry written from the same perspective**

that they chose (e.g., the “volunteer” for one group should closely read the “volunteer” entry from his or her partner’s group).

- In class, divide students into pairs for discussion. Each student should be paired with the person from his or her partner blog who wrote about the same role.
- In pairs, students should discuss the following questions: What commonalities did you notice in your entries? Are these commonalities explained by the fact that you have a common role (e.g., homeowner) or by other factors? How did your entries differ? To what do you attribute these differences?

2. Meet back together as a class. To wrap up the blog project, discuss the following questions: What did you learn about housing problems and Habitat for Humanity while creating your blog? Did any new information surprise you? Overall, do you think housing problems in each country are more similar to or more different from one another? Why? Do you think that Habitat for Humanity volunteers benefit from working on these projects? If so, how?

■ Assessment:

Evaluate student blogs based on the rubric on page 11.

■ Optional Extension:

Encourage students to evoke discussions on each others’ blogs through the use of the “Comments” feature.

Ask each group to share their blog URL with the remaining groups who have not yet seen it. Require that each student make three comments on these other groups’ blogs. Students can do this by clicking the “Leave a comment” link at the bottom of an individual entry. A student can make a single comment on three different blogs, or he or she may choose to start a discussion about a single entry and reply two or three times. Students should leave their names at the bottom of their comments in order to receive credit.

Explain to students that comments should be substantial and specific. They should ask a probing question raised by the entry; follow up on a concept or issue raised by the entry; or provide an informed analytical observation of a point in the entry. Students will not be given credit for entries that fail to demonstrate meaningful thought.

The Need for Housing: Get the Facts

In the United States...

- the cost of housing should comprise 30% or less of a family's household income. If this percentage is higher than 30%, a family is considered "cost burdened."
- according to government statistics, 18.6 million families currently spend 50% or more of their income on housing. Nearly a third of U.S. families spend more than 30%.
- having a steady job does not guarantee affordable housing. Research shows that a full-time, minimum wage job in the U.S. does not earn an individual enough money to support the cost of renting even a one-bedroom apartment.
- one in three Americans faces housing problems (due to unaffordable housing, homelessness, overcrowding, or other causes).

Around the World...

- if current trends continue, the percentage of people around the world who lack decent, affordable housing will rise to 40% by 2030.
- one in three people who live in urban areas are living in slum-like conditions (overcrowded and/or unsafe homes with a lack of sanitation).
- worldwide, 14 million people are currently living in refugee conditions—typically tents or other types of transient housing.

Without Proper Housing...

- children are more likely to have behavioral problems and lower test scores in school.

- children are more likely to live with housing and economic hardship when they grow up.
- community members are less likely to participate in local government or volunteer work.
- family members are at increased risk for infection and disease.

With Proper Housing...

- children are more likely to achieve academically and be more prosperous as adults.
- families are able to accumulate more wealth over a given amount of time than a similar family without a decent home.
- families can contribute more to local businesses, boosting overall community wealth.
- household adults are more likely to find and maintain steady employment.

Having a decent and affordable home encourages families to be active, engaged community members with a reliable income, priming children for future prosperity and achievement.

The lack of proper housing is a basic issue that has a resonating negative effect: it discourages achievement and restricts a family's ability to prosper.

A Conversation with Temir Atyabayev

Temir Atyabayev* and his family live in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, which is a small country in central Asia off China's western border. Atyabayev, who is 30 years old, worked with Habitat for Humanity to build his family a safe and affordable cane-reed house—a type of house made primarily of clay and reed branches and equipped with a floor that is heated from below.

What was life like for you and your family before you worked with Habitat?

I live with my wife Roza and our three children: Edisa, who is four, Klara, who is three, and our son Almabek, who is seven months old. Before Almabek was born, the four of us lived in a garage in a large car park that we had redone into a place to live. Our “house” had two rooms. One room was a hall, kitchen, and dining room all in one and the other was our bedroom. We were paying 50 dollars a month to rent it. The garage had a cement floor, no indoor plumbing, and walls that were damp and cold. We had to use the public toilet that served the entire car park, and we had no central heat, so in the winter we heated our “house” with a small electrical stove.

This garage was unhealthy and dangerous for the children, but we could not afford anything better. There was a terrible smell of gasoline and exhaust as well as constant noise because cars came in and out of the car park 24/7. The only advantage of our location was that it was next to the tile shop where I work.

What do you do for a living?

I graduated technical school to be a welder, but did not find work in my field. I work in a shop selling tiles and other construction materials. I work in the shop from eight in the morning until seven in the evening.

How did you get involved with Habitat, and what was it like working with Habitat volunteers?

Roza came across information about Habitat in the local newspaper. Once we started work on our home, I worked with volunteers on our construction site and Roza cooked

lunches for us all. We became good friends with many of the volunteers. We have their photos on the wall and keep warm memories about them, their help and support. All of my neighbors worked together to build each others' homes.



A cane-reed house under construction.

How have things changed for you and your family?

I am the happy beneficiary of a cane-reed house. Our home is very good for cold winters. We have under-floor heating, and our kids can play on the warm floor all winter without catching a cold. We can switch it off or on whenever we like. It is very comfortable. It has improved my family's health as well. We used to live in the garage, where we were always cold. Now, we are warm, have separate rooms, and have hot water available. My wife can cook more easily. Everything is much easier here.

It is also great to live in a neighborhood where your neighbors are happy—happy to have their own space, and happy to have found peace.

I hope my kids will grow up healthy and smart in this house. We live in a “Habitat” settlement district and our small neighborhood will have new generations born and growing up here. Because of Habitat, my family's life is better. We can better take care of our three children and we are positive about our future.

**Names have been changed.*

Making a Living Then, Making a Life Now

By Phillip Jordan

Phnom Penh, Cambodia—On a 95-degree afternoon in early November 2009, Sam Sue and his wife, Ly Pheap, began gathering shoes inside their wood-shack home. Sitting on the ground, Pheap gave each pair of shoes a final cleaning before Sue stuffed them into a white rice bag about four feet deep.

The couple had repaired the shoes after salvaging them from Phnom Penh's Steung Meanchey municipal dump, where nine tons of trash is discarded daily. The dump loomed a couple hundred feet from their house. The dump's smell invaded their home, their clothes, their nostrils. It made their three children sick.

When Sue could not fit anymore shoes in the rice bag, he strapped it to his back and climbed onto his green-and-white motorbike. Through Phnom Penh's crowded streets, it took about an hour to reach the Takamao night market.



Sam Sue and his wife, Ly Pheap stand with volunteers who helped build their Habitat home during the 2009 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.

Sue set up shop between two food vendors selling bread and sandwiches. He laid down a blue tarp and began placing the shoes on top: men's shoes on one side, women's shoes on the other. For the next four hours, long after sunset, Sue joked and bargained with potential customers. He scrambled to keep the shoes organized as people threw them back on the tarp. He never got off his knees except to thank someone for making a purchase.

"When he first started to sell, he was too shy," Pheap had said of Sue earlier that afternoon. She smiled when she said it. "So I had to tell him what to tell people. He had a difficult time selling women's shoes. I told him to wave his hand and ask women how they were doing, to make them feel welcome."

By 9 p.m. Sue had made \$25, mostly from women whose shifts had just ended at several nearby garment factories. It was factory payday. Many days and nights net Sue or Pheap \$5 or less. As he knocked the dirt off his pants and repacked shoes into the rice bag, Sue spoke softly: "I am tired of this. The glue we use to repair the shoes is toxic, and we have headaches all the time. I am away from my family too much."

He put the bag on his back again and sat on his bike. He put on his helmet, felt for the \$25 in his left pocket once more and rode back toward the dump through the darkness.

A New Life

Today, Sam Sue, 33, Ly Pheap, 31, and their three children—sons Se and Say and daughter Davan—do not have to sift through trash for discarded shoes anymore. They live in a safe, healthy Habitat house in Oudong, about 45 kilometers away from Phnom Penh.

They are among 21 families who partnered with Habitat for Humanity Cambodia to leave the Steung Meanchey dump behind. The families worked with more than 250 volunteers from 13 countries to build their new homes in Oudong during the 2009 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.

The families named their Habitat neighborhood the New Life Community. Immediately to the community's west, rice fields stretch to the horizon. Just a couple of kilometers to the east, four 13th-century temple tops rise from Preah Reachtrop Mountain.

In the land behind her house, Pheap has planted a mango tree.

Back in mid-November, Sue worked alongside volunteers

to place bricks and spread mortar. Now he has a job as a construction assistant with Habitat Cambodia, producing stabilized soil blocks to be used in a nearby Habitat development called New Holistic Hope. Fifty-two other partner families will relocate there from Steung Meanchey.

Sue and Pheap also head their community's education committee, a task they take seriously. Their own children attend Arey Kasat School in Oudong and study English each morning with a teacher who visits their community.

"The children are the future of this community," Sue says. "If they do not go to school, they will walk down the wrong path in life, and this community will suffer."

Pheap grew up in the countryside, a daughter of vegetable farmers. As a girl living on the farm, she wasn't given the chance to go to school. Perhaps that is why her secret dream was to somehow become a teacher.

Instead, as a mother, she has also sold fish, repaired shoes and done whatever else was needed to support her children. Now she hopes their education will allow them to do what she never could.

"If they follow my advice, learn in school and become teachers, I would be very happy," she says.

The Journey Home

Habitat Cambodia staffers know the sacrifice parents like Pheap and Sue make for their children.

On the day many of the families moved to Oudong, Sue helped load a rented 1980s-model Hyundai Porter with everyone's possessions. During the hour-long ride, Pheap sat atop pieces of furniture in the truck, holding her children close. Sue helped lead the multifamily caravan on his motorbike, his family's only mode of transportation.

Once home, families helped each other unload and later celebrated with a community dinner.

Before the celebration, however, Sue had set up a meeting with a visitor in front of his new home. Sue sold the man his motorbike.

"I need money for medicine for my children," Sue explained later. "I had to do it."

Today, Sue doesn't have to resort to such measures. For one thing, his children's health is much improved since leaving the dump. And Sue and Pheap now have new ways to make money. Over the past several months, Habitat Cambodia partnered with donors and other nonprofits to organize a series of income-generating workshops for families.

Many women in the community have learned how to make soap they can sell at a nearby market. Others have learned how to knit scarves and make hand-woven baskets to sell to visitors heading to the nearby temples.

Habitat donors have provided a well and water pump to enable families to grow some of their own food. And thanks to another income opportunity sponsored by an Australian church, families have learned how to raise chickens and ducks. Families obtain the birds through a loan. When they sell the poultry, their loan repayment goes into a community fund that supports other livelihood activities.

These programs, along with their new jobs, mean Sam Sue and Ly Pheap no longer have to return to Phnom Penh to scavenge for shoes to repair.

"I feel overjoyed, and I wonder why—why does Habitat care about us so much?" Sue asks. "They really care about us. I have the feeling I have joined a big family."

Learning Lessons

For students, a Habitat house has benefits beyond its four walls.

By Rebekah Daniel

After more than two decades of volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, Ellen Williams of Greenville, S.C., has stories to tell. But there is one that comes to mind that still resonates with her, years after the event took place.

Not long after Habitat for Humanity of Greenville County was founded in 1985, a group of affiliate supporters and Habitat for Humanity founder Millard Fuller took a trip into the mountains to see a house dedication. Though most of the children at the dedication had never seen a microphone before, one little girl stepped up to tell what her new house meant to her.



The children of Habitat homeowners around the world gain the stability that is a side effect of achieving affordable housing. Photo by Ezra Millstein

“They handed the mic to a girl who said she didn’t have to be ashamed of what was behind her when she got on the school bus,” Williams says. “That made a big impression on me, since we were busing kids from downtown out to the suburbs to go to school.

“The middle school kids had started getting ashamed of where they lived. If the whole neighborhood was poor, and they didn’t notice they were poor, it didn’t bother them. But if they drove through a nice neighborhood to a nice school,

they started getting uncomfortable with where they lived.”

It was not the first time she had noticed a connection between housing conditions and a child’s educational experiences. As a substitute teacher and volunteer with a local homeless shelter, and later as a volunteer with Head Start, she had worked with children who, though otherwise very different, all had one thing in common: unstable housing. As families hopped from apartment to apartment in search of lower rents, the children lost their footing. Head Start intervention helped somewhat, and Williams started to wonder if addressing the housing issues might make an even bigger difference.

Though housing is notoriously difficult to isolate from issues such as neighborhood security and income levels for research purposes, several studies have shown definite connections between different housing problems and children’s educational outcomes.

From a physical perspective, two housing-related health issues—lead poisoning and asthma—surface in the discussion of children and education. Even though lead-based paint was banned for use in the home in 1978, the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that approximately 24 million homes still have significant lead-based paint hazards today. Lead poisoning’s effects are irreversible and can include reduced IQs, impaired growth and neurological development, and behavior problems, according to several studies completed in the early 1990s. Children under the age of 6 are especially vulnerable as their brains and central nervous systems are still developing, and lead can interfere with this process. Asthma, the most common chronic disease among children, occurs at higher rates among poor children and can be caused or aggravated by environmental factors such as mold, dust mites, mice and cockroaches, as well as the pesticides and chemicals used to treat housing for such allergens.

From an economic point of view, affordability becomes a determining factor in other housing stress points, such as overcrowding, poor neighborhood quality and housing cost burdens for parents. Each of these has an implication for education. In overcrowded homes, a lack of quiet, uncluttered space to study can harm a child’s ability to

learn; dangerous neighborhoods leave few productive activities for children during non-school hours; financially strapped parents are occupied with keeping the lights on and food on the table, leaving little time or energy for attending school functions.

Perhaps the most detrimental characteristic of housing problems as far as education is concerned, however, is a high rate of student mobility. While parents chase affordable rents from location to location, move voluntarily to avoid dangerous living conditions or lose their homes after job loss, children negotiate changes of their own, drifting in and out of classrooms, peer networks and curricula. The problem is not only the elusiveness of solid walls and a roof, but the disruption in the child's sense of community and belonging.

If a family moves away from home, the child's world changes. "You're going to a brand-new school, you don't know anyone, you don't feel safe, you don't know the curriculum," says Sid Ong, a Portland, Ore.-area elementary school principal. "All of a sudden, you start developing gaps in your education."

From an administrative perspective, the challenges mount as well. The educational gaps of a few children can impact the entire classroom as teachers struggle to cover new material while getting some students caught up on the basics they missed in another school. "They go quiet on you," Ong says, "and you find as you move up in the grades, the holes become daunting to fill. We start noticing dropouts around the 8th grade."

The signs of housing stress, Ong says, are recognizable even to those who don't spend more than a few minutes in a classroom. Teachers recognize that unstable housing can manifest itself in behavior problems, incomplete assignments and an inability to stay awake during class. Other students know this, too.

"The other kids know where people live, they know the situation," Ong says. "We're really lucky here that the kids are really supportive of each other. They do their best to recognize those kids who don't have the same environment, and they support them. They help them with their work in subtle ways." Not everyone is so lucky.

The factors that cause this instability—and the solutions Habitat programs employ to mitigate it—are both simple and complex. On one hand is a straightforward conflict between the cost of housing and available income.

"We've seen house prices go up," says Habitat Portland/Metro East executive director Steve Messinetti. "They've doubled in the past 10 years, and incomes have hardly changed. In our county, the average low-income family moves every 15 months because of rising rents."

On the other hand, factors ranging from urban renewal to immigration trends are driving the price increases. In Portland, an urban renewal effort some years ago was largely successful in making inner-city housing desirable for professionals with higher income levels than the current residents. Consequently, prices rose, and those families with limited or low incomes started moving out, looking for affordable housing wherever they could find it. Affordable housing also attracted families following jobs to the area who were new to the city, the region, the country.

"You get pockets where the majority of the population is new to the community, and the areas are not neighborhood-oriented," Messinetti says. "The federal and local dollars are going to the areas that needed renewal in the past and not to the new areas. The money hasn't caught up with the need."

Along with the need for adequate, affordable shelter is the need for community, that sense of belonging to a place, that can reassure highly mobile families that it is now safe to put down roots, to sign their kids up for sports teams with confidence that they'll finish the season in the same place. Habitat Portland has been building both.

Julie Hommes became a Habitat homeowner in March 2005, moving into a new house and a new community on the same day. Fourteen other Habitat families live in her neighborhood, and while many of them do not share even a native language, the process of building each others' houses and learning to be homeowners—together—has created a bond.

"When you're renting and moving all the time, your neighbors change all the time and you don't get to know them," Hommes says. "My neighbors here are like really close friends. It's a really different experience from what I was used to before becoming a homeowner."

"I know if I don't get home on time, my kids can go to anyone's house and be safe," she continues. "If I'm writing a huge paper, I can sit on my porch and watch my kids play and still feel like I'm still doing a good job as a mom."

Of Hommes' five children, the two youngest may gain the strongest benefit from the stability of Habitat



Julie Hommes moved into her Habitat house with her husband, Fernando Madrid, in 2005. Siblings Jarret, Eli na, Mylie and Rio welcomed another brother, Felix, two years ago. Photo courtesy Habitat Portland/Metro East

homeownership; they will come home each afternoon of their school careers to the same house, the same neighbors, the same community. But the predictability and affordability of their Habitat mortgage is opening educational opportunities for Julie and her husband, Fernando, right now. Both of them are following long-deferred dreams in higher education: Fernando, who currently works at a bilingual school as a community liaison to Spanish-speaking parents and assistant kindergarten teacher, has begun work on his master's degree in education. Julie will finish her liberal arts degree in about a year and a half and hopes to continue on with a master of divinity degree.

"I'm thinking I may be a chaplain, or maybe teaching," she says. "Before this I was trying to think more money-wise, maybe nursing. It wasn't really my passion—I wasn't thinking about what I would do if money weren't the deciding factor in all the decisions of my life.

"If I were renting, I would worry about the rent going up, having to move, changing schools with the kids. Now that we're in this house, we're not going to be looking for a place to live. We can afford to live here. Habitat has been a huge blessing because it took away that stress.

"With my kids seeing me read and write papers, I don't have to preach at them that it's important to go to school. They can see it."

With volunteers from all walks of life building together and homeowners investing sweat and time in the construction of their homes, the Habitat model of building houses and communities can impact a child's education above and beyond the simple advantage of a safe, warm and stable place to sleep, Ong says.

"It's a great model for kids to see how a group of people can come together and make something positive happen and not have a vested interest per se," he says. "And they get to see their parents really building something that is the underpinning bedrock of the family itself. They look at that and say, 'I can accomplish anything. I can give back.' They want to go to college and become a professional in such a way they want to give back."

About 29 million children in the United States lived in low-income families in 2000, running a higher risk of housing problems and the accompanying educational challenges. Today, Habitat has built more than 300,000 houses around the world, housing almost a million children. At the heart of the mission are the families—and the children—who have so much to gain.

"With a family, you've got to have stability," Hommes says. "You've got to have roots. An organization like Habitat is saying, 'We value families. We value each kid.' This is a place for families to grow and develop and blossom."

Blog Rubric

Directions: After the conclusion of the project on Day 3, visit each student blog and use the following rubric for evaluation. After your evaluation is complete, encourage students to delete their blogs by accessing the “Settings” tab on blogger.com and selecting “delete blog.”

	Exceeds Expectation (4)	Meets Expectation (3)	Partly Meets Expectation (2)	Fails to Meet Expectation (1)
Individual Criteria				
Accuracy of Information	All factual information is well-researched and accurate.	Most of the information is well-researched and accurate.	Some of the information is accurate.	Little to none of the information is accurate.
Applicability and Organization	All required content is present and organized logically.	Most required content is present and well organized.	Some required content is missing. Organization is not always logical.	Little to no required content is present. The writing appears disorganized.
Application of Knowledge	Student shows a strong understanding of global housing problems and Habitat’s role in solving them.	Student shows a good understanding of global housing problems and Habitat’s role in solving them.	Student shows a limited understanding of global housing problems and Habitat’s role in solving them.	Student shows no understanding of global housing problems and Habitat’s role in solving them.
Tone	Student convincingly writes in the voice of the character. Tone is respectful and empathetic.	Student generally writes in the voice of the character. Tone is generally respectful.	Student unconvincingly writes in the voice of the character. Tone may show a lack of empathy for the character.	Student demonstrates no attempt to write in the voice of the character. Tone is uncaring or disrespectful.
Group Criterion				
Blog Cohesiveness	All entries present a consistent portrait of a fictional family.	Most entries present a consistent portrait of a fictional family.	Some entries disagree or fail to cohere to other entries’ family portraits.	Each entry displays a different understanding of the fictional family.