

Spring sends down rays of sunlight glimmering off of handsaws and swinging hammers as I drive another nail into the side of the house. Volunteers beside me work diligently to raise the walls and attach them to the empty frame. Habitat for Humanity builds these houses and sells them with no profit to needy families. Working beside me is Al Mather, who leads the Habitat project in the Plymouth, NH area, working on his 16th house in the area thus far.

The music of banging hammers and cutting wood surrounds the house telling a story about helping the needy and building someone's future. Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry. Around the world from America to developing countries Habitat for Humanity seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action. Building a home for those less fortunate than myself earns a certain place in my heart. There is a feeling that arises with doing community service. A feeling beyond explanation that starts deep inside and warms the soul.

As we work Al tells me stories about past projects that have been produced in the area and how they have helped people throughout the area. Many families have benefited from new homes that are either built by volunteers or have been shipped in as modular homes. Al and the other workers just finished making their first two-story Habitat house. After this construction is finished, work will get started on a "woman build" house, which will be built mostly by women.

Habitat has been building houses since Millard Fuller and his wife, Linda, founded it in 1976. Since then over 85,000 houses around the world, providing more than 425,000 people with homes in over 2,000 different communities. These houses are not just given to anyone though. Needy families must apply to Habitat when they are awarded the house; they do need to pay for it. Aside from making a down payment and monthly mortgage payments, the new owners of the house work constantly, putting in hours of their own labor (what the Habitat people like to call, Sweat Equity) to build their home.

Just around the corner working on their to-be-home are Linda and Ed Lundquist, parents of three, hammering away at their empty walls of security. The Lundquists work seven days a week on their home along side contractors, plumbers, and carpenters, welcoming volunteers on a regular basis. Linda shares stories of working on houses for friends before they had a home to move into. She tells me how grateful she is to be living here and how they plan to move in by June. Her work on this house cuts the cost of buying a home or paying for people to build it.

Habitat for Humanity relies on people like Linda to work on their own homes, as well as volunteers and affiliates to fund the projects. The affiliates are usually local independent or non-profit organizations who give to Habitat. The family living in the new home is part of this affiliate group. All of the affiliates are coordinate a specific aspect of getting the home built such as fund raising, building site selection, family selection, etc.

Linda and her family were one of many families trying to live in this new house. All of the families wanting a Habitat house are asked to apply for the home through the local affiliates. Then, a selection team decides

non-discriminantly who gets the house by seeing who is the most needy, who can pay off the no-interest loan, and their willingness to become partners in building. At this point, building goes underway. Using volunteers and donations to the project, the affiliates and the family start putting together their new house.

As the hours and days go by the new house begins to take shape and the inside sheet rocking and plumbing start. With the family, affiliates and volunteers working almost every single day the building goes remarkably fast as I watch the house grow from it's bare frame to near completion. Habitat for Humanity works as fast as possible to build decent shelters for needy families. Although it is not a government agency in anyway, and receives no funding from the government, it works closely with different branches to help alleviate poverty and homelessness. Habitat for Humanity welcomes partnerships with governments to help prepare for the construction of houses. These stage-setting funds and gifts might include land, houses for rehabilitation, infrastructure for streets, utilities and administrative expenses.

There's still a lot of work to get done on this home. Everyday the Lundquists are joined by a team of local carpenters and workers putting some of the final touches on the exterior of the house. As the days go by and the building continues the summer weather starts to set in, making work just a little harder even in such a mountainous region. The workers press on with no expected reward other than a good strong feeling coming from helping someone who is needy. Around the country people volunteer every day to build homes for others. Habitat for Humanity even runs a project called RV-Care-A-Vanner, where eager volunteers ride around the country in their own recreational vehicle (RV, Motor home, van, etc.) and help to build houses. These are men and women from all walks of life and all ages who just want to lend a helping hand.

These RV Care-A-Vanners help to "put shelter on the hearts and minds of people in such a powerful way that poverty housing and homelessness become socially, politically, and religiously unacceptable in our nation and world", says Fuller, still founder and President of Habitat. They do this through a variety of volunteer activities as well as working to help people in the form of disaster rescue teams.

Aside from the work done around the country by Habitat, great work is also done around the world. Just like the RV Care-A-Vanners, Habitat takes people on one to three week long projects around the world in order to develop a strong "Global Village" and help solve poverty world wide. These trips bring about a sense of community cross culturally and help to make stronger bonds between those volunteering. Volunteers need to pay to go on these trips as part of the donation. Trips can cost anywhere from one thousand dollars to thirty-five hundred dollars.

Each day new faces arrive at the work site to help Linda and her family finish their house as soon as possible. Depending on the help and affiliates building a house can be either a long term project or quick and easy. Anyone is allowed to come and help out. Other areas in the country former President, Jimmy Carter, works with Habitat to build as many houses as possible. He and a large team of volunteers together have built 155 houses in only one week. They all travel between Florida, Georgia, and New York building an average of over 20 houses per day.

Since it's founding in 1976 Habitat for Humanity lends its hands to people across America and across the world. What started as a church organization to build homes for the needy has grown to provide thousands of homes for poverty housing families and a place for volunteers to come make new friends and feel the excitement on working on a housing project. As I leave the working grounds for another day I look back and see the half-finished house and marvel at the effort taken to build it. Linda and her family will probably be moving in by sometime in June, as soon as all the work is done. Before they hang their first picture and mark the walls with how tall their children are this house already has enough character for a lifetime from all the help that made it so.