

Dear Friend;

I left Buffalo to attend college here in New York City thinking I would return during breaks and then only to visit family. But there is something more than family that always calls me back; I believe it is not only the city's incredible history and the friendliness of its people, but because the city has so much promise! It is true right now that Buffalo faces a major housing crisis that contributes to increased crime and drug rates, but I saw vacant properties every day while working for a not for profit, Buffalo ReUse, this summer and decided it doesn't have to remain this way; something can be done about it. Through a program I am involved in at my college I am receiving funding to address some of Buffalo's pervasive housing issues.

The program is Barnard College's Centennial Scholars Program—a program that selects only fifteen women in each class year to participate. As a Centennial Scholar I take classes on leadership and innovation and am given funding to complete an independent project which culminates in a presentation during my senior year. Oftentimes students use this program to conduct research in their academic field, but my Centennial Scholar project is more action-based and centers on the Buffalo ReUse mantra of “if not you, then who?” It is easy to identify problems and point the finger of blame, but it is much harder to put a foot down and actually change a problem into a solution. This is what I am proposing with my project.

My plan is to buy a house on Buffalo's east side where vacancy rates are highest and to reestablish a community around sustainability and food security. The house that I am purchasing through an upcoming foreclosure auction is a house that has been abandoned for a number of years and is in need of repairs. Working alongside Buffalo ReUse, I will turn this house into a "how to" center for the community where various workshops would be offered on drywall installation, painting—anything a house needs for general upkeep. In addition, the surrounding lawn would be converted into a vegetable garden, promoting food security and reducing food costs for the poverty stricken neighborhood. In creating this learning lab and garden I envision it becoming a hub for area residents where they are able to begin with the basics of building rehabilitation and receive support in bettering their neighborhood. I am hoping to address problems of educational and economic inequity within Buffalo and these workshops would give low income community members the power and knowledge to maintain their houses, offer a job skill set, and provide them with an economically feasible and highly nutritional way to feed their family. It is my dream that by providing a means for people to beautify their homes and by fostering relationships with neighbors, the Buffalo community will grow stronger and the city will once more be an inviting place to live.

Reflecting on the summer I spent in Buffalo, I now realize that I have grown to love and be inspired by Buffalo not because of the wings, the Bills, the beef on weck, but because it is my hometown and because there is a future for it if we act now. Buffalo cannot afford to waste time by continuing to ignore the housing crisis. This is why I hope you will support my Centennial Scholars project and contribute any amount that you are able. I realize that as a country we are going through financially difficult times—all the more reason to donate! The inner city neighborhoods are the ones being hit the hardest, and it only takes one person to care enough about what happens there to enact change. While I do receive some money from my college for an initial investment, I need to raise roughly \$10,000 more dollars through grants and through asking people like you in order to fund all major repairs to the house, pay insurance costs and to purchase gardening supplies. If you would like to contribute funds, a check or cash can be sent to my campus address listed below. If you would like to donate time or supplies to the project that would also be very welcome. Help me so we can build a better Buffalo together!

Thank you,

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