

Habitat for Humanity is active and growing in Tucson, and as a result there are many new areas being looked at for new homes. As with anything that people are unfamiliar with, existing residents in these areas are uneasy about these new developments and the people who will move into them. Marie Curie once said, "Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood." Rather than learn more about the Habitat program, some people instinctively wish to reject the development in order to not have to deal with it.

My family lives in a Habitat for Humanity home, and while I understand these "Not in My Back Yard" or NIMBY reactions, I would like to help those who are uneasy to understand more about us.

In many ways, an area is better off with a Habitat for Humanity development than they would be if regular housing were built in its place! When a regular housing development is built, the only criteria for a new resident is that they can get a loan for the house and move in. When someone moves into a Habitat for Humanity home, they have been interviewed and carefully screened before being accepted into the program. Recipients have to fill out applications, write essays explaining why they should receive a house, be employed, pass a credit check, have a home visit, pay a down payment, donate 250 hours or more per adult to Habitat and then make a mortgage payment just like everyone else! Each Habitat community has a home owners association and signs a long agreement that spells out how their houses must be kept and maintained and how they are to behave. Don't confuse the Habitat program with the "housing projects" we hear so many horror stories about – there is no comparison between the two.

Habitat for Humanity is a perfect example of giving people a "hand up" rather than a "hand out." Those who are more conservative and resent government programs that dole out money without requiring those who receive it to do anything for it can support this program because every step in the process involves the future homeowner and requires work and dedication to make it to the goal of homeownership. Those who are more liberal and profess to care about the poor and downtrodden can support this program because it takes many of those who are struggling and helps lift them up and give them an opportunity for a better life. I truly believe that Habitat for Humanity is one of the few programs that can be equally supported by everyone regardless of where they fall in the political spectrum.

My community was built in an area that has been around for decades, and I'm sure that many people were uneasy when they learned that my community was being built. It has been over three years now, and when you drive through our area many of the neatest houses are the Habitat homes. Many of the homes in the area that didn't look very nice when we moved in have been cleaned up and are better maintained. The worst houses were torn down and replaced by new construction as the area became more desirable. I think that the Habitat project actually revitalized my neighborhood rather than pulled it down. Thanks to Habitat for Humanity, our neighbors' homes are worth much more than they were before our arrival.

Is everything perfect in "Habitatland?" Of course not. You are dealing with people, and people aren't perfect and are prone to disappoint. We have people who can be jerks and bad neighbors just like anyplace else! But how many of us have ever lived in ANY neighborhood where there wasn't at least one neighbor that everyone wished had chosen to live in their in-law's neighborhood rather than their own? For the most part, everyone is grateful for the opportunity they have been given and are good neighbors.

Habitat for Humanity is a program of hope. It allows people who may never have been able to own a home to do so. It puts a sense of confidence in their lives and a spring to their step. Many of us grew up convinced that we would never amount to anything and were destined to live in dangerous and crummy areas and barely scrape by until we finally died. Suddenly, we are home owners, and if we were able to accomplish something that seemed so impossible, what else might we be able to accomplish? People start taking classes to better educate themselves. They get better jobs. They can get a car that is transportation rather than an adventure. They feel better about themselves, and their children can now grow up with the realization that the American dream CAN be reached and they can make something of themselves as well. They can graduate from High School, go to college and get a good job rather than drop out and sell drugs because they don't think they will live to be 25 years old. We are people just like you, just maybe less fortunate before we became your neighbor. Together, let's continue to improve our community and our lives. Let's become YIMBYs rather than NIMBYs and say, "Yes in My Back Yard."

So... if you want good neighbors, if you want to revitalize your neighborhood call Habitat. More importantly, let your City Council member and your County Supervisor know that you support Habitat's YIMBY philosophy and you hope that they will too. Let's all become YIMBYs. Your neighborhood will be better off, and you will see how great this program is. Who knows? Maybe – just maybe – seeing people attain their dreams may reawaken some of your own!

Matt Brock
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Habitat Homeowners

The "Yes In My Back Yard" or YIMBY Habitat awareness campaign promotes the socioeconomic benefits and interdependence of homeownership, economic development, community action, and opportunity for all within our diverse community.

Regardless of the community issue... when the "us and them" mentality is set aside, community solutions can be forged for the benefit of all.

Habitat invites individuals, civic groups, faith communities, and community-minded businesses to join us in the "Attitude that makes progress possible."

Cox Communications is a major sponsor of the YIMBY Habitat campaign.

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