

Tenant Voices: Amber Rodriguez Tells Her Story



Amber Rodriguez and her family have dealt with an inconsistent and irresponsible landlord for the past two years. She discovered her roof was leaking when water poured from the ceiling into her child's bedroom on a rainy night. She knew she had to do something. She immediately contacted her landlord and was told it would be fixed in a few days. Two months later, the roof was finally repaired. Meanwhile, the floor in the bedroom was destroyed from the water and the landlord put a thin sheet of linoleum over the floor to fix the issue. "Really, all this is doing is covering up the water damaged floor," Amber said as she demonstrated how the floor creaked and bent under her weight.

Mold is growing in her bathroom from gaps in the wall due to improperly installed bathroom fixtures. The knobs and shower head were not caulked. Amber has no control over the temperature setting for her water heater and it is set so high that it has scalded family members when they were showering. The bathroom toilet is

cracked and the floor underneath is caving. There is a space between the bathtub and floor. Her sink is barely attached to the wall by loose fitting bolts.

After months of little result, Amber made a complaint to Grand Rapids Housing Inspections. The City found nineteen violations and gave the landlord a 30-day period to complete many of the repairs. As of this writing, the landlord has yet to get started.

Amber is often asked by others, "Why don't you just move out?" Amber replies, "Of course, I've heard 'Just move out.' I don't have that kind of money. It takes money to move, and that's a big expense! We are trying to make it by. We pay our rent but, it's tight at the end of the month." She included, "I'm just happy and excited that something is finally being done about this place and Healthy Homes is here to help me out."

Amber is currently trying to find as many resources to improve her housing situation as possible. "It's tough, there are resources out there, but every place is basically a gamble to see if they have funding to help us or not. It's hard to find resources we can use."

Amber's story is one of many being featured in the Tenant Voice Project (see sidebar).

Tenants Speak Out!

The Healthy Homes Coalition, along with the Kent County Renters Alliance with support from the National Center for Healthy Housing, has launched the **Tenant Voice Project** to amplify the voices of tenants as they seek safe and healthy housing. To hear more tenant voices describing their concerns about unsafe housing, point your browser to tenantvoices.wordpress.com, or like us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).



Spring & Summer Events

Building Healthy Homes Tours

July 19, Noon

August 8, Noon

September 14, Noon

Healthy Homes Coalition
742 Franklin St SE

Come learn more about what the Healthy Homes Coalition does and how you can get involved. Light lunch provided. Questions? Call Paul at (616) 241-3300.

Pest Management Training

June 27, 8:30 - 4:30pm

Learn how to help families get rid of cockroaches or mice in their homes! After attending this training, participants will know how to eliminate these pests without relying upon toxic sprays and regulated products. Call (616) 241-3300 to register.

Rock The Block with LINC

June 9

Come see Healthy Homes at LINC's "Rock the Block" block party at Madison and Hall.

Healthy Homes Volunteer of the Year



At the May Annual Meeting, the Healthy Homes Coalition recognized Scott Kauffman for the hours of help he has given to ensure homes are safe for families in Grand Rapids.

The way in which Scott became aware of Healthy Homes was rather unconventional. Scott said, "I heard about Healthy Homes from seeing Courtney on TV being interviewed about free radon tests. While picking up

my radon test, I learned more about the important work that Healthy Homes does to directly improve the lives of children and families so I asked about volunteering opportunities."

Scott explains that his rationale for volunteering is simple. "I have always been blessed to have healthy homes to live in, so it is nice to help out an organization that helps others who are not so lucky."

Scott recommends that you get involved with Healthy Homes to make our community safe. "This is a great organization with dedicated individuals who are making a difference. I highly encourage others to get involved and to volunteer with Healthy Homes. It is a great way to give back to the community."

What Would You do to Save a Life?

You can help save a life! Carbon monoxide is the number one cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the nation and we all know the risks of house fires. Having working carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms in homes literally save lives.

The Healthy Homes Coalition has hundreds of carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms, but we are in need of a handful of volunteers to make sure these devices get installed. "We don't just give away the alarms," said Healthy Homes Executive Director Paul Haan. "We make sure they are installed properly. With giveaway programs, too many families forget to install the alarms or they put them in the wrong places. With our program, lives are saved!"

That's where you come in. The Healthy Homes Coalition is looking for adult volunteers willing to be trained and sent into homes to do alarm installations. Volunteers will be given on-the-job training as they shadow a Healthy Homes staff member on a visit to install alarms. This provides a hands-on opportunity for volunteers to become more familiar with the installation process.

Volunteering to install CO and smoke alarms is a great opportunity for people to get involved in the Grand Rapids community, make homes safer, and increase fire safety awareness.

To begin your career as a volunteer life saver, call Betsy at Healthy Homes today at (616) 241-3300 x305.

CO Alarm Installed by Healthy Homes Saves Lives

One of the success stories we like to tell around Healthy Homes is the story about the carbon monoxide alarm we installed in a home on the 300 block of Brown Street, SW. In June of 2009, one of our AmeriCorps volunteers, Cicely Wiers-Windemuller, installed an alarm as part of our overall comprehensive services to help families make their homes safer for their children. While Healthy Homes was initially called to this home to help with a child with an elevated blood lead level, smoke and CO alarms were installed as an added level of protection.

A year later, Healthy Homes returned for a one-year follow-up and was told a stunning story about the true value of perception. On a cool, rainy day, the family was hosting a birthday party for one of their young children. The home was filled with guests, many of them school-age children and younger. To make for a festive event, the stove was working overtime to make food for all the guests. It was then that the alarm went off!

Fortunately, the family remembered the instructions shared by Healthy Homes. They quickly vacated the home and called the fire department once everyone was safely outside. After the fire truck arrived with sirens blaring, a fireman went into the home to check out the situation. Indeed, the alarm had alerted the family to the deadly gas that was coming from the malfunctioning stove.

Free Carbon Monoxide and Smoke Alarms

The Healthy Homes Coalition, with generous funding support from FEMA and FM Global, has free smoke and CO alarms available for low-moderate income households with children. Homes must be in Grand Rapids or northeast Wyoming. Interested families should call Jenn at (616) 241-3300 x303 for more details.

Help Kids Succeed. No Cape Necessary



Grand Rapids is blessed with many community efforts that are working hard to make sure children will succeed in life. Whether it's Believe to Become, Baby Scholars, First Steps, or Healthy Homes, each of these groups are making sure that the children in our community thrive.

It would be easy for many of us to sit back in our easy chair and leave all this work to those who have secured the million dollar grants to protect kids. Indeed, child well-being does seem to be evolving into quite the big money enterprise!

But the reality is that both are needed. We *should* be investing significant financial resources into our children's futures. But all those resources are meaningless without the daily actions that caring people make on behalf of kids.

It's daily actions that make those financial resources pay off. Whether it's a volunteer like Cicely hanging a CO alarm or a parent like Amber speaking out about her housing conditions, all the big money programs in the world won't make one bit of difference without the simple actions of caring people.

Day after day, we see more and more examples of how the small investments of time that people make are paying big dividends for children. A parent takes twenty minutes out of their day to read to their children. A friend watches another's children for an evening to relieve a little stress for mom or dad. A neighbor passes along the used tricycle that was collecting dust since their little one graduated to two wheels.

It's these small, simple actions that better, and sometimes even save children's lives. It's the fifteen minutes here and a couple of hours there. Without these investments, no sum of money can help children thrive.

You can make a big difference for kids too. Connect with Healthy Homes and discover the simple tasks that you might do—an hour or two at a time—that will save lives. All that is needed is your time. No cape is necessary.

Thanks for Your Support!

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Yes! I'd like to help children grow up strong, smart, and healthy by protecting them from environmental hazards in their homes and becoming a member of the Healthy Homes Coalition!



Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Sponsorship Amount

- \$25.00 Basic Member
- \$50.00 Regular Member
- \$100.00 Supporting Member
- \$200.00 Sustaining Member

Checks should be made payable to:
 Healthy Homes Coalition
 742 Franklin SE
 Grand Rapids MI 49507

Or made online at
www.HealthyHomesCoalition.org

Join our **Giving Circle** by pledging a special gift over the next five years.

- Healthy Futures Conservator
\$1,000 per year for five years
- Healthy Futures Builder
\$500 per year for five years
- Healthy Futures Friend
\$250 per year for five years

Radon Action Month Activities Help People Prevent Cancer

Radon Action Month was huge a success! This past January, the Healthy Homes Coalition distributed more than 100 free radon test kits with the help of dedicated volunteers. Some of these volunteers walked through neighborhoods in the Grand Rapids area, handing out information on radon and the free test kits. Others conducted follow up visits and phone calls to remind the families to mail the kits in for results.

Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, and the primary cause for non-smokers. Since it is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas, it is impossible to know if there is radon in the home just by looking or smelling. A special test kit is needed. Radon seeps in from the bedrock underneath the foundation of a home and any home may have high levels of radon. All homes should be tested.

Healthy Homes also set up a booth at the West Michigan Home and Garden show at DeVos Place in early March. Combined, volunteers contributed more than 50 hours to make sure people were safe from radon. The large turn out for the event made this a great opportunity for Healthy Homes staff and volunteers to share our mission, sell test kits, and to spread the word about the harmful effects of radon.

To get your radon test kit, drop by the Healthy Homes Coalition at [742 Franklin Street SE](#).

Non-Toxic Extermination

The Healthy Homes Coalition has two opportunities for people to join the ranks of those who keep our community pest-free using nontoxic methods. Do you know how to free a home of thousands of cockroaches without spraying toxic sprays or using bug bombs?

On Wednesday, June 27, Healthy Homes will be holding a full-day training on how to control cockroaches, mice, and rats using non-toxic methods. Participants will learn the strategies Healthy Homes has used to successfully clean-up dozens of homes. The training is underwritten by the US-EPA and uses a curriculum developed by the National Center for Healthy Housing. There is a \$10.00 charge for those who would like to have lunch brought in. For more information, call Healthy Homes at [\(616\) 241-3300](#).

Healthy Homes is also seeking volunteers interested in learning Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and lending a hand to their fellow neighbors. Volunteers will be linked to families with children with asthma to help them clear the air of pest allergens to help the children breathe easier. After they are paired with the family, volunteers will give 1-2 hours per week during the first month, then will touch base on a monthly basis for another 3-5 months. Healthy Homes provides all supplies. Interested? Call Betsy at [\(616\) 241-3300](#).



Our Current Programs

Healthy Homes Assessments

Trained staff assess the home for a wide variety of children's environmental health concerns, including lead, asthma triggers, radon, carbon monoxide, accidental injury, and more. Assessments are followed-up by the development of an action plan, education, and connection to resources.

Smoke and CO Alarms

Free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms installed in the home.

Radon Testing

Free radon testing for families participating in Healthy Homes Assessments. \$5 do-it-yourself kits available for all others.

Pest Management

Help eradicating cockroaches, mice and rats using child and environmentally friendly tactics.

Classes and Education

Healthy Homes offers a wide variety of classes for parents and professionals.

Eligibility

Most of Healthy Homes' programs are restricted to low-moderate income families with children birth through age five living in pre-1978 housing in Grand Rapids and northeast Wyoming. Call for details.

 Sustainably printed, with our kids' future in mind!

Get the Lead Out! Home Repair Program Returns!

After a six-month hiatus, the wildly popular *Get the Lead Out!* Home Repair program will be returning for Grand Rapids residents this summer. Due to lack of federal funds, the program was discontinued in January 2012 after making more than 1,100 homes lead-safe. City of Grand Rapids and Healthy Homes Coalition staff worked diligently to get funding renewed and were rewarded this spring with another \$2.48 million in grant funding.



In a new twist to this year's program, 45 homes will be served with more comprehensive healthy homes interventions, including such things as reduction of asthma triggers, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and repairs of trip and fall hazards.

To learn more about the program as it is re-launched this summer, visit www.GetTheLeadOutGR.com.