

Growing in Community: John's Story



“My name is John Ugwoagonwu and I am from Nigeria, West Africa. I came to Michigan, here in Lansing, about 18 years ago because I wanted to study at Michigan State University and get a degree in Agriculture. I have my wife, Jovita, my daughter, Jennifer, and my two sons, Johnson and Justice. But my wife is still in Nigeria, she has not come to this country. My daughter, Jennifer, I sent her home to go to one of the best universities in Nigeria. My two sons are here with me. One goes to Eastern High School and the other goes to Sheridan Road School. I live right here on the Eastside, I am an Eastsider, you know?”

I first heard about Allen Neighborhood Center through the newsletter that comes to my door every few months. I see it, I read it, I see it, I read it; it came to a point I decided to come to Allen Neighborhood Center to see what it is all about. The first program I came to 10 years ago was BreadBasket. I came to BreadBasket because we needed some help – food stuff, you know? I was a student and I couldn't make enough money and I had to feed my children, you know? So I decided to come over here to get some help. The bread we got over here was very helpful and we really enjoyed it, me and my family. My daughter and I started to come in to get 3 or 4 loaves of bread, and we eat it for a whole week and we were very satisfied. I still come to BreadBasket!

I am now involved with Market Walk and Market Moves, and because of them, able to go to the Allen Farmers Market. When I started the Market Walk, my blood pressure was 200 – I started the program here and then my blood pressure goes very down to normal, you know? I went back to my doctor at Sparrow Hospital and he says, 'John what have you been doing? It is amazing! Continue with that!'

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What this center means to me is that this is a place, an organization, that cares for the people that reside in this neighborhood. They are very helpful because they care for our health, they care for our food, they make sure that we get enough food to eat, and they are very friendly – they mean a lot. It is just like a family to me, you know? They are willing to go some extra miles for those people who live in this neighborhood, you know? And that gives me a lot of pleasure and happiness. So that's what it means to me. A family. They care for one another. Since I'm part of this neighborhood, I love to make some contributions. I love to help wherever I can, you know? When people work together, they all grow together. Here on the Eastside, I help my neighbors rake their grass, clean their lawn, and other stuff. Since I'm able to do it, I'm more than happy to help.

The reason why we need funding and support it is that this neighborhood is really helping people. And when they get this, they will continue these programs and continue serving this community.

This organization – they are going to use the money to help the entire people of this neighborhood, you know? In terms of health, in terms of food, and in terms of social activities.

And that's why I encourage them to go ahead, and go ahead, and go ahead and do it!"