



# Voice

of Affordable Housing

**February 2012**

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**Celebrating 72 Years of Caring**  
a newsletter for the residents and employees  
of the Asheville Housing Authority



**Santa makes traditional visit to children at Pisgah View's Project MARCH Learning Center**

# Lewis says never give up — *“When one door closes, a multitude of others can open.”*



**O**lufemi Lewis is a firm believer that anyone can accomplish their dreams. “Just because you’re an African American woman and a single mother living in Public Housing, doesn’t mean you can’t achieve your dreams. You just can’t give up! Even though society often labels us, we don’t have to conform to society’s view, says Olufemi, which means “God loves me”. Those circumstances don’t have to make you who you are . . . a premise that Olufemi is personally proving, day by day as she embraces her new name given to her by a special friend as a symbol of her new life.

Even at a young age, Olufemi felt mentally older than her physical age and described herself as “street smart” — something that eventually led her into trouble that she’s spent years trying to overcome. Raised in generational poverty, Olufemi’s mother worked two or three jobs at a time as the sole support of her children — just like her mother had done and all the mothers on back through the generations of her family.

Now, Olufemi is struggling to break out of that cycle and determined to teach her children to be more conscious about their own relationships, what they put into their bodies, the environment, and much more, in hopes of giving them a different outlook on life.

Olufemi’s transformation began after 2008-2009, which was a particularly tough time in her life — she had lost her job and the only grandmother she had ever known. She was trying to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) but soon discovered that her criminal background was a dead-end barrier to her desired career. But, instead of giving up, she started volunteering at the Pisgah View Community Garden and soon discovered what wonderful therapy volunteering and working with the earth could be.

Next, along came an opportunity to work on the HACA weatherization crew through Green Opportunities (GO). Even though she initially knew nothing about weatherization and was the only female on the crew, Olufemi worked her way up to crew leader for Go’s training team.

A year and a half later, armed with her new community building and outreach experience, she was selected for her current position as COR Public Relations Coordinator for a recycling program for used cooking oil by Green Opportunities. In her new role, Olufemi promotes recycling instead of pouring oil and grease down our drains, something that is clogging up Asheville’s sewer system and messing up our environment. The recycled oil powers converted vehicles that use the oil as Bio Fuel instead of traditional gasoline. Even though the COR program has collected 1250 gallons of waste cooking oil in the last three months, they need everyone’s help

to collect even more of the estimated 66 gallons of oil that is used by each person in Asheville every year. She says it’s everyone’s opportunity to create a cleaner, more environmentally friendly community for our children and ourselves by simply placing the used oil in COR’s collection bins located around town, including the River District Recycling Center and the Buncombe County Land Fill, and in several HACA communities. Locations are listed at [www.cookingoilrecycling.org](http://www.cookingoilrecycling.org).

Olufemi says she has particularly enjoyed the part of her job that has her speaking at community meetings to tell residents about the recycling opportunity and hopes to use her new found ability for motivational speaking in the future to inspire others with her personal story.

Olufemi’s long-term goal is to pursue a masters degree in Psychology and Agriculture. Through her work at the Pisgah View Garden, she learned what good therapy digging in the earth and growing food provides and she wants to organize similar programs to help heal others. Olufemi also realizes the value of getting involved in her community and serves on HACA’s Resident Council as Assistant Secretary and as Sergeant at Arms for the Hillcrest Residents Association. She encourages fellow residents to join their associations to positively impact their community and further their own personal transformation.

Olufemi says, “I give thanks to my creator, Green Opportunities, Blue Ridge Bio Fuels, my friends and family and all that believe in me.”