

Hearts Rebuilding Homes campaign spreads love to low-income homeowners

By MIKE AVERILL World Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, February 13, 2015 12:00 am

By making repairs to her house, volunteers with Rebuilding Together Tulsa have done much more than ensure that Stephanie Jones has a safe home in which to care for her granddaughters.

“They’ve restored my faith in humanity,” Jones said.

She contacted the agency, which provides free repairs for low-income seniors or disabled homeowners, to see if she could get a hole in her roof fixed.

Jones was worried because the hole meant she couldn’t get her home insured.

When she learned that the agency was going to do a lot more than fix the hole, she was overjoyed.

“This is like winning the lotto for me. I cried. I lost it,” she said of the new roof and siding. “This has shown me that there are still good people out there. I’ve seen so much bad stuff, it’s so awesome to see such nice people.”

Last year Rebuilding Together Tulsa provided repairs to 136 homes with an average value of \$8,529 per home. The agency’s 369 volunteers put in more than 7,900 hours.

“Providing repairs for deserving homeowners like Stephanie allows them to remain living in their home and have a safe and healthy place to raise their families and age in place,” said Kelly Hall, agency spokeswoman.

Rebuilding clients must own their home, live within Tulsa’s city limits and be 60 or older or living with a disability. The agency offers roof repairs, home safety repairs and modifications, energy efficiency work and a variety of other services that include painting, electrical work, carpentry and more.



rebuild

Rebuilding Together Tulsa volunteer Terry Rainey nails on new siding Thursday as part of the group's Valentine's Day campaign, Hearts Rebuilding Homes.
CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

Jones, who has lived in the home for nearly 10 years, has been caring full-time for her two granddaughters, including Elizabeth Valenzuela, 17, who has a mental disability.

“I’m not the best person in the world, but I’m doing everything I can for my girls,” she said.

When Jones gained custody of Elizabeth, her granddaughter hardly spoke — only a word here or there. Now she’s speaking in sentences.

“It’s awesome to see her open up. I just wish I could do more,” she said. “She didn’t know how to dress herself and now she does — even though sometimes she puts her clothes on backwards, but I don’t say anything.”

Jones said that being able to spend time with her granddaughter in a safe environment has helped her grow. When she found out the hole in the roof was going to prevent her from getting insurance, she was concerned that the safe environment was in jeopardy.

“Without insurance, if something happened to the house, I don’t even own a car to sleep in. I don’t know where we’d be,” she said. “I can’t tell you how grateful I am. I’m going to have the best-looking house on the block.”