

The Houses that Vicky built

While a big part of Vicky Dayton's job is using her encyclopedic knowledge of government regulations, it is not what has gotten her up in the morning for 25 years.

Instead, Dayton's passion for the job comes from knowing the effect Housing Opportunities Inc. (HOI) has had on hundreds of families – with more to come.

Dayton's last official day as HOI's executive director is Nov. 13. However, she will stay on as a consultant to her replacement, Callie Miller, until the end of the year. Miller has been the bookkeeper and Dayton's right hand for nearly seven years.

"If Callie needs me, she is free to pick up the phone or send me an email," Dayton said. "I will answer her questions and share my advice, which is to never give up."

As Dayton prepares for her last day on the job, she looked back at the many ways housing architectural plans have come to life in central Kansas.

"When you show an apartment, you often see the tears of joy and then come the hugs," she explained. "People will say 'this is the nicest place I've ever lived.' We can tell story upon story upon story about what HOI has meant to hundreds of families."

For example, a woman who used a wheelchair lived in what was supposedly a handicapped-accessible residence. But the only option for bathing was a tub. HOI made her life much easier in a new, totally accessible home with a roll-in shower.

In another instance, a woman had been going backwards on her hands and knees down the stairs to do the laundry. She then went back up the stairs, again on her hands and knees while her husband carried the laundry upstairs. There are no steps in an HOI senior apartment.

"Then there was a woman who made five visits to an apartment before she and her husband decided it would be

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- Vicky Dayton, HOI's Executive Director



their new home," Dayton recalled. "When I asked why she looked so many times, she said 'all I could see during the first three visits was the washer and dryer. I had to come back to see the rest of it.'"

At the time, the couple was living in another senior residence but had to do laundry in a different building.

Dayton, an HOI co-founder, officially began her association with the non-profit entity as a volunteer board member in 1995; she was named executive director in 2000.

HOI-managed residences are designed for those 55 and older with low-to-moderate incomes. Rent is based on income and the number of people in the household. Every appliance is included, and HOI provides service to all of them. In addition, yard work and snow removal are part of the package for seniors.

The agency's major partners include Kansas Housing Resources Corp., Midwest Housing Equity Group, Mesner Development Co. and Horizon Bank in Nebraska. HOI also works with local lenders that fill in loan gaps. As a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, HOI accepts private donations.

So far, HOI has been awarded over \$41 million to build rental and ownership housing. It has added more than \$14 million to market and non-market property values, and paid over \$1 million in property taxes, over \$25 million to local



Housing Opportunities Celebrates Completion of Kensington Square Duplex Development (Oct 2018)

contractors and subcontractors, and more than \$4 million in wages.

The first step that led to all of this was a \$3,600 donation from the Ellinwood City Council for HOI's first project – The Oaks, a 12-unit complex in Ellinwood. Today, HOI owns, manages and maintains 228 rentals. Other towns involved are Great Bend, Hoisington, Larned, Lyons, Sterling and Scott City. More than 600 families have been served.

"That \$3,600 from Ellinwood morphed into what we have today and will have in the future," Dayton said. "We cannot thank them enough."

The next step, a 24-unit complex called Quail Cove, is in the works on Great Bend's far west side. "We have projects lined up for the next five to 10 years," Dayton said. "Every town has its own waiting list and Great Bend's list has maintained 150-200 for about 15 years. We must keep pace because a project can take two to three years to complete."

"It is not easy to do what we do," she added. "We are highly regulated and the paperwork is monumental. But the rewards outweigh the regulations."

The HOI office at 1313 Stone is the only one in Kansas. "In the past," Dayton said, "there were 40 Community Housing Development Organizations in the state. Only 20 are left. Of those, five are active. HOI is one of those five. We are truly grassroots."

As Dayton mentions these successes, she recalls an early experience while being raised in Great Bend. "I grew up in a church with many senior citizens. I loved them all. But little did I know they would lead me to the great joy of serving seniors through HOI."

Dayton plans to take a week off and then go back to work with her husband, Norman, at Dayton Security; they own the 38-year-old local venture. And then there are the two grandchildren. "I am really looking forward to spending more time with them and our children. I want to thank our employees, board of directors and partners for such great support through the years."

To learn more about Housing Opportunities, [CLICK HERE.](#)

