

INSERT DATE  
INSERT FIRST & LAST NAME  
INSERT ADDRESS

Dear -----,

I'd like to tell you why I have joined on to this "Heroes of Hope" campaign.

We are facing a crisis of "housing extinction" in Charleston for families of low income means. Our communities where these families have lived for generations are becoming ripped apart by rapid gentrification and housing disrepair. In these neighborhoods hundreds of families live in a state of housing crisis that demands urgent or significant repair – structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, etc. – to make their homes safe, sanitary and comfortable. And, due to disrepair and age, these houses are typically highly inefficient and *extremely* expensive to heat and cool, making them truly unaffordable for families of fixed income or limited means.

These families often pay \$400 or more (sometimes a lot more) per month to keep the air circulating and the lights on. It is a fact: low income families carry the highest "energy burden," meaning that those that can least afford their energy actually pay the most for it. Many families expend as much (or more) to heat and cool their homes than they do for their mortgage, health care costs, transportation, or food. It is truly an under-told story, and a crisis right here in Charleston where electric bills for many families have risen by 30% since 2010.

Where dilapidated housing and underserved communities in economic crisis are found, you typically find crime. Many of our youth in underserved communities choose this path of crime when faced with having little access to opportunity. In choosing crime they deny themselves education, and sometimes even end up incarcerated. With lack of education and/or incarceration the barriers to gainful employment get stronger and unemployment increases the chances an individual will commit crime. It's all a viscous, interrelated cycle.

But there are always solutions, and some are really powerful. Protecting property by fixing and sustaining housing helps families become economically empowered and is always a "win". But when our young people in neighborhoods of distress can access opportunity AND be trained for viable careers.... now that is a "double-win" that can literally save communities!

The Sustainability Institute (SI) has received national attention for its innovative approaches to fixing and upgrading the efficiency of housing. They are also on a short list of organizations known as trusted partners of communities facing serious vulnerabilities. SI has a reputation for doing a lot with a small budget: in fact, they have weatherized and upgraded more than 230 homes for low-income families in the Charleston area, often saving them more than \$1,000 per year!

Even more impressively, they have done this while at the same time serving more than 125 at-risk, young adults in a program designed to provide them with industry skills, jobs and "life transformations" (with an outstanding 90% job placement rate for graduates). Many of these young adults were once written off by society (over 60% had been previously incarcerated) but are now career professionals, income earners and assets to our community. For every young adult who doesn't wind up in prison (or back in prison) because of SI's program, our community saves \$20,925 a year. SI's high standards and innovative approach helped them to win the Home Depot Foundation's National Award of Excellence in 2011.

“Heroes of Hope” is a particularly important campaign because the Sustainability Institute has decided to form a strategic alliance with another well-respected nonprofit, Home Works of America (HWOA), to double its impact. Whereas SI’s expertise is in weatherizing and upgrading homes to help families reduce their energy expenses, Home Works’ expertise is in making critical home repairs such as roof replacement and structural modifications. Together, the two organizations can holistically repair and upgrade homes with the goal of making them safe, healthy, affordable and lasting. As an affordable housing strategy, it’s an obvious alliance and one that has the power to save homes and entire communities!

Together they plan to target 4 communities in summer and fall of 2018 and to fully repair 15 houses. Each Heroes of Hope house will build hope in the community as a home is saved – and sustained – for another generation or more. Additionally, with each home SI repairs, 10 at-risk, young adults receive hands-on training in weatherization and construction as they participate in “service learning” in their community.

**\*How can you help and what will your money support?**

The Heroes of Hope campaign will raise \$70,000 to perform weatherization and energy upgrades on 15 houses this summer and fall – homes that will also receive critical home repairs from Home Works. The campaign will also raise \$130,000 for related programmatic and operational expenses needed to support SI’s training program for at-risk youth. In total, SI will raise \$200,000.

I’d like to ask you to consider joining me by becoming a hero and making a tax deductible contribution to the Heroes of Hope campaign. It will mean a lot to families who have nowhere else to turn.

- ❖ A \$1,000 contribution will pay for the materials and supplies to weatherize and upgrade one house.
- ❖ A \$2,000 contribution will cover the costs of training one at-risk young adult for six months. And, because the program is affiliated with AmeriCorps, students receive an educational stipend of \$3,600 from AmeriCorps for completing and graduating from the program!
- ❖ A \$4,500 contribution will fully cover the cost to weatherize and upgrade one house (materials, supplies & labor). The repairs will last 20 years or more and will provide comfort and health benefits too.

I sincerely thank you for reading this letter and for your consideration. Asking people for money - even to support a critical cause - is never easy. Thank you for allowing me to intrude. I know that together, we can raise this \$200,000 and spark some real hope for our community.

Please go to the following link for more information and to make your contribution now. Your organization will receive special recognition from SI for being a hero for their campaign, but just as importantly, you will be a hero to me.

**\*Link to Campaign:** <http://sustainabilityinstitutesc.org/contribute/>

With genuine thanks,

Your name here

