

Making an Impact: Changing Lives and Uniting Families in Puerto Rico A PathStone Housing Project

There is a significant shortage of quality housing for migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFW) throughout the country. In many cases, the housing that does exist is substandard. The lack of decent living space affects both migrant farmworkers, who need short-term accommodations, and seasonal farmworkers, that require permanent residences. This dearth of housing options in rural communities leads to overcrowding, rent gouging, and unsafe living conditions. To combat this problem, the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) provides housing assistance grants. These grants offer emergency and temporary housing solutions, investments in housing assistance for migrant and seasonal farmworkers' permanent residences, and leveraging of services, which increase or maintain the available housing to farmworkers and underserved farmworker communities.

(Map of Lajas, Puerto Rico. Source: <https://islandsofpuertorico.com/lajas-puerto-rico/>)



PathStone Corporation, a NFJP grantee, has been working on a number of housing programs and projects to benefit Puerto Rican farmworkers. At this time, they are the only not-for-profit organization developing permanent housing units

for farmworkers in Puerto Rico. In April, 2017, PathStone broke ground on 18 rental units in the La Candelaria Ward of Lajas. Lajas is a municipality in southwestern Puerto Rico (highlighted in red on the map).

The population of Lajas grew significantly in recent years due to improvements to infrastructure. Manufacturing, retail, hospitality, fishing, and agriculture drive the local economy. Lajas also leads in sheep production, and ranks highly in the production and sale of cattle.

For the new housing, PathStone staff led all of the pre-development activities, while the local staff in Puerto Rico coordinated all closing activities related to the purchase. The local staff also managed construction, final acceptance, and the certificate of occupancy process with local permit agencies. Fortunately, the damage that Puerto Rico sustained from the hurricanes did not affect the progress in building the new units, and they were completed in April, 2018.



(Photo of the Entrance to the Housing Project)

(Photo of a Kitchen in a Unit)



At this time, all 18 units are occupied. These units range from 1-3 bedrooms. Up to seven people can live in a 3-bedroom unit. Most farmworkers renting these units plant, harvest, collect, and/or pack products such as pineapples, papaya, or corn. PathStone strives not only to develop safe and decent housing, but to change lives. While it is hard to measure the impact of having a permanent home, one particular tenant loved to share his joy of living in the new unit. Roberto, one of the very first applicants who moved into a rental unit, was homeless and living in his

car when the project's social worker met him. He did not have a decent place to live, let alone bathe. As a tenant, Roberto was extremely grateful to live in a new home and he kept the unit very clean and organized. His neighbors loved his friendly nature. Sadly, Roberto passed away in August from a massive heart attack. But for a moment in time, PathStone provided him dignity, safety, and a community that cared about him.

Another tenant, Fernando, is a young farmworker from Hormigueros. Fernando and his girlfriend were separated from their family for over a year due to a lack of decent housing. The PathStone project provided the couple a way to reunite their family and live with their children. They are very grateful to have a safe home that is the appropriate size. Fernando is a very hard worker and proud to be a farmworker.

(Photo of a Playground in the Housing Community)

Edgardo and Inés have been together for more than five years. After working in the U.S. for awhile, Edgardo returned to Puerto Rico and began working in agriculture. Edgardo lived with his mother in Salinas, while Ines lived with her mother in Guanica, creating a long-distance relationship. It takes over an hour to drive between the municipalities. A relative offered them a small room but Ines decided to stay with her mother while Edgardo desperately searched for an appropriate home. They had almost lost hope of finding a decent place together, when Edgardo saw the PathStone project's advertisement. The couple cannot put into words their happiness in living in their own place.



PathStone is currently working on site selection for the next farmworker development project. In addition, the organization is launching an owner-occupied home rehabilitation program, which will serve farmworkers and other low-income households. Owner-occupied home rehabilitation programs support low-income people living in the selected property as their primary residence at the time the assistance is received.