



IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2023 FAMILY FINALIST: FREEDOM BUILDERS OF AMERICA

INITIATIVE: WAREHOUSE FOR STORAGE OF DONATED CONSTRUCTION SUPPLIES

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE – IN THE APPLICANT’S WORDS

For over 22 years, Freedom Builders has met critical housing needs in northern Michigan. Utilizing a dedicated group of volunteers of all ages, Freedom Builders facilitates service projects that meet needs and connect struggling families with people who care for them and can help.

Freedom Builders has recently purchased property in Chums Village and is seeking funding to construct a building. The property is the geographical center of the five-county area where the organization serves, and the building will house equipment and materials, make it easier for the organization to receive and store donated materials, improve the organization's ability to gather and train volunteers, reduce costs and improve efficiency, and more.

All these will directly increase the ability of Freedom Builders to fulfill its mission to "rebuild hope, one home at a time." The resulting impact on northern Michigan will be the increased improvement of the lives of people in need and those who serve and care for them.

The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant.

While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Financial Review Committee (FRC) and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.

ORGANIZATION’S VISION STATEMENT

The Visions of Freedom Builders is to Provide the most urgent housing assistance to those in need through its volunteers, donors and agency and trade partners to demonstrate to the most hurting they have significant value.

ORGANIZATION’S MISSION STATEMENT

The Missions Statement of Freedom Builders of America is to provide Hope to those living in deplorable housing conditions in the 5-county area by equipping volunteers and utilizing the generosity of donors.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

Freedom Builders of America began as a nonprofit ministry in August of 2000. For over twenty-two years, the organization has equipped volunteers to serve families with critical housing needs in the five-county region of Northern Michigan: Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, Antrim, and Kalkaska counties.

Freedom Builders completes approximately 325-350 projects each year through regional volunteers. Our volunteers are primarily individuals and groups from faith communities but include people from businesses, schools, service clubs, and high school athletic teams. Everyone interested in helping is welcome to serve with Freedom Builders!

Most of our referrals come from social service agencies in the region. Freedom Builders is often known as the organization of last resort: We help when other organizations cannot.

Most of the families we serve live with a sense of hopelessness in homes that are in deplorable condition. Feeling hopeless and living in a deplorable condition feels insurmountable. Imagine being the mother of an 18-month-old and having to heat your home with space heaters while your physically abusive ex-husband tries to take your daughter away because of it. Imagine living in a home without running water - for several years. Imagine being a caseworker trying to help an elderly couple that just received an eviction notice because of the condition of their home, and you can't find anyone to hire to help them. In each of these situations, Freedom Builders stepped in with a group of volunteers to help.

In an average year, through a staff of three and groups of volunteers, Freedom Builders will install 60-80 wheelchair ramps on homes with no safe form of ingress or egress. We will renovate 25-30 bathrooms, making them accessible to people with disabilities. Freedom Builders will update up to 20 bathrooms about to fall through the floor. We'll install 15-25 new roof systems. Some of those roofs will have holes so big you can drop a microwave oven through them. In the winter, we will install 7-10 new furnaces. Freedom Builders will also repair countless furnaces, fix plumbing and flooring issues, install windows, and more.

All of our work is to meet the most critical housing needs in Northern Michigan. But what excites us the most is when people wonder why we would help them, we tell each person they are valuable, have intrinsic worth, are loved and cared for, and that our community has not forgotten them. When this happens, we accomplish our core purpose of rebuilding hope, one home at a time.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

Freedom Builders has operated for over 22 years as a nonprofit ministry meeting critical housing needs in northern Michigan.

The organization has never rented or owned its facility since generous community members donated locations to store supplies and equipment and serve as office space. We currently have three separate locations throughout northern Michigan.

These sites include construction trailers three miles south of Chums Corners, a warehouse facility three miles west of Chums Corners, and a bulk storage facility over twenty-five miles north of Chum's Corners on Old Mission Peninsula. The distance between these sites means we often drive up to 85 miles round trip to prepare for projects.

With the use of the storage facility on Old Mission Peninsula coming to an end, we have asked supporters to consider donating new storage space, and we have searched for storage space to lease or purchase. Both have been unsuccessful. Donated storage space isn't available, and the cost of leasing or purchasing space would create a financial burden on the organization.

We have also learned that purchasing property and building a new building would be substantially less in cost. This option offers Freedom Builders a great opportunity! It would allow us to receive donated goods from area lumber yards, reclaimed materials from trade companies such as furnaces from plumbing and heating companies, and discounted items.

A practical example of the benefit of this opportunity is when we install working kitchens in 5-10 homes each year that do not have them due to cost. We could store the materials needed for these projects, something we have not been able to do in the past.

We have secured property in Chums Village to build a building that would house all Freedom Builders operations in one location. The location is in the geographical center of the five-county area we serve. The efficiency and cost-savings we will gain with a new building will tremendously increase and improve our capacity to fulfill our organization's mission and serve families in need, resulting in an increased impact on our community.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

A centrally-located building will increase our ability to serve families facing critical housing needs in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim, Benzie, and Kalkaska counties. In the five-county region served by Freedom Builders, there are an estimated 6,998 families living below the poverty level, and there are another 14,615 families that cannot afford the basics where they live in ALICE households: Asset Limited, Income Constrained Employees.

The families Freedom Builders serves fall into both categories: Below the poverty level or unable to afford renovations needed to ensure their homes are livable and safe. When a crisis hits, such as a leaking roof, broken furnace, or need for a wheelchair ramp, these families are forced to make tough choices with long-term consequences, such as between paying for quality childcare, food, or rent.

Most of the referrals we receive come from service agencies in northern Michigan, and the main reason referrals come from these agencies is that they cannot meet the needs presented through agency programs or with agency funds. One reason is that they cannot find contractors willing to enter homes

they deem deplorable and offer assistance. Another reason is that agencies cannot identify funding sources.

As a result, Freedom Builders has nurtured partnerships with local agencies and has become a place of "last resort" available to meet these critical needs.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

For over 22 years, Freedom Builders has served families with the most critical housing needs in northern Michigan.

Even as social service agencies of the region have done good work to stand in the gap for these families, often they are unable to help. In some cases, a lack of funding, or funding restrictions, prevent them from assisting families living in manufactured homes or parks or when families do not own their houses or land. In other cases, families in need do not meet minimum credit standards or other prerequisites for assistance. In other cases, the type of work needed does not fit agency funding. In the worst cases, agencies cannot find a contractor willing to work on projects because of the state of the homes.

Local agencies contact Freedom Builders for help in all cases mentioned above. We never turn a situation away because we perceive the circumstance as a problem that is too bad or difficult to address. Although we cannot meet every need, we often thrive in helping families in these difficult situations. Through our committed volunteers and donors, we create sustainable, safe, and healthy homes that rebuild hope. When that happens, lives begin to change.

In the first few years of the organization, Freedom Builders served 45-55 families each year. The number of families quickly grew to 150-175 families served, and for the last ten years, an average of 275 families served on an average of 350 projects. (some families have multiple issues we address).

We are currently working from three separate donated locations for staging and storing project materials. Our time at the largest of these locations, where we keep donated materials worth tens of thousands of dollars, is ending. This situation is a challenge and a blessing, as it is on Old Mission Peninsula, far from most areas we serve. The obstacle brings the opportunity to build one centrally located facility that will house all our operations, allowing us to receive more donated goods, manage our inventory better, gather and train volunteers more efficiently, and more. The result will be more families served!

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

This Building project once we are moved into reduces our cost significantly through efficiency of personnel and reduced fuel and wear and tear on our equipment. We will consolidate 3 construction service locations. We will also very quickly relocate our office location to that same building and in that we will eliminate paying rent for our office location. The maintenance and upkeep on a post and frame structure is very minimal and is something the personnel of Freedom Builders are highly capable of handling themselves. For all of these reasons we are confident we will be able to do more for those we serve while reducing our costs.

For the past 22 years we have been able to weather the storms of the ups and downs of the economy and the impact of Covid all without ever allowing any of it to negatively effect or cause us to reduce services.