

Our projects lead to long-term relationships. Donate today to help us continue this support!



"As long as *we* are together."

Two days before Christmas many families are thinking about gifts and celebrations.

Others are preoccupied with their family's most basic needs, like where they will be sleeping tomorrow, how to make ends meet this month, and how to keep their children feeling safe as they move from place to place.

This was the case for **Lucretia and Alex** when we stopped by to see them last December 23rd.

Having moved around for several months, they were running out of options for their family. The next day, Christmas Eve, they would have to move again. Where would they go this time?

"We'll figure something out...as long as we're together," Lucretia told us.



We met Lucretia seven months earlier during **the Story Garden** at the flea market in Gallup, NM. Her son Alexander was all smiles during his first day there, highly engaged and focused for a two year old! Alexodus, his seven-year-old sister, came along the following week. Both loved learning games on the computer, and Alexodus jumped with joy into the arts and crafts and reading.

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Recently Alexodus and Alexander came to the Story Garden with their mom. Alexodus was as enthusiastic as always, starting with the set-up. We asked her to put the shelves out and then put the books on display in them. She began and then came over to us a few minutes later. "I love helping," she said, smiling with obvious joy. Lucretia helped her son on the computer, while Alexodus did the art activity and seemed very happy with the result. When we dropped them off later at the place they were staying, Alexodus said, "I want to come back to the Story Garden again!" And when her little brother looked sad, Alexodus added, "He wants to go back to the Story Garden because he had fun there!" Their mom explained: "For that moment at the Story Garden, they forgot all their troubles and what they were going through."

Lucretia and Alex are concerned about the other families going through a similar situation: "We just want to encourage other families that are struggling to stay strong and keep going. It's not just about us. It's about other parents too. We're not the only family struggling. There are others who need encouragement. Don't give up. As long as a family sticks together, opportunities are out there. Possibilities are out there if you work at it."

Lucretia and Alex are not sure when they will be able to come back to the Story Garden because they don't know where they will be staying week by week. But Alex is working hard to make ends meet and shares his wife's faith: "Just as long as we're together, we'll make it happen." The Story Garden will continue to support that faith and remain the same for the families who look forward to this space of peace and hope. **In this space formed around books and artistic activities, families can dream together and stay free from daily challenges.** This can't happen without all of us working together. Your support allows the Story Garden to be that stable space where community members can always come back to. **We hope you'll join us in building long-term relationships that families can count on over weeks, months, and years, by making a donation today.**

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While the kids enjoyed themselves, Lucretia shared her concern that her son is two and doesn't really speak well yet. "Is that normal?" she wondered. She was looking for ways to get a sense of his development so she could support him. Over the several months that we have known Lucretia and Alex, **their strong commitment to nurturing their children's growth, development and overall well-being has been a common theme.** While dealing with daily challenges that could break some families, they have managed to create a bubble of security, stability and joy for their children.

Like many families in the US, Lucretia's family has been moving from place to place for months, like a relative's apartment or trailer, a tiny unheated room in an acquaintance's overcrowded home, or even a motel room. It's a life of bouncing around and keeping your child in school when you don't have stable housing or a functioning vehicle.



Two days before Christmas, Lucretia felt sad about what they were going through. Her two-year-old seemed upset and confused sometimes. "Is it because of all the changes we've been through?" she asked herself. He couldn't articulate words yet. If only she could understand better how he was feeling... Alex was thinking about how to best support his son with potty training, a hard task when you don't have stable housing to make the child feel comfortable and secure. And where would Alexodus be going to school in January after the break? It was breaking their heart to have to move her to a new school again. At that moment and many others, we in the Gallup team were humbled by how parents in such challenging situations can be so keenly focused on their children's emotional, physical and intellectual well-being.



Through all the changes and challenges that families go through with housing, schools and more, the Story Garden remains a constant in children's lives. It can and should be a safe place that families can depend on week after week.

### **The Story Garden facilitators strive to learn about parents' efforts to nurture their children.**

We hope to support those efforts by offering home visits, learning times at our workspace, and accompaniment to library programs and other family events in the community. We sometimes offer books and educational toys for the families to enjoy with their children. We might offer a ride to check their mail, look into resources available with service providers, write a letter of support, and help with transportation to look for employment or move the family from place to place.

Lucretia and Alex's efforts over these past months paid off. Alexodus has good attendance at school and is a great student, curious and keenly observant. She even teaches the ABCs to her little brother, and her mom sees that as a good sign that her daughter is developing a love of learning and love for her little brother. They made an appointment for Alexander's speech evaluation and he is as joyful as ever. Both parents are working as much as they can, and they continue to look for stable housing possibilities each day.