

## CASE STUDY

# Saying goodbye to sky-high bills: how energy efficiency helps Falls Church families thrive



## GRANDVIEW APARTMENTS

is a multifamily housing community in Falls Church, Virginia, spanning across 19 buildings with 266 units.

“We are part of a big family,” says Ana Echeandia, property manager. People who live here tend to stay. Grandview Apartments is also the most affordable housing in the area, thanks to the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, the largest affordable production and preservation program in the United States.

## MODERN UPGRADES FOR OLDER HOMES

The apartments were built in 1962, and in 2000, Grandview was rehabilitated using the Housing Credit program, which requires the developers to keep the units affordable for 30 years. With help from utility programs, the owners of Grandview

Apartments are able to use energy efficiency as a tool to maintain that commitment. At Grandview, tenants pay their own utility bills with some paying bills as high as \$300 per month before efficiency upgrades. Starting in 2015, through a partnership between Dominion Energy Virginia, Washington Gas Care Program and Community Housing Partners (CHP) Energy Solutions, the buildings underwent major efficiency upgrades. This included return vents, HVAC duct systems, A/C units, and LED light bulbs in bathrooms and dining room chandeliers.

## LOWER BILLS MEAN GREATER COMFORT

Now, Ana says that tenant complaints about high energy bills have stopped. Tenants have taken notice of the lower energy bills. For example, Betty Arnez, 39, has lived in her unit for seven years with her two kids: Joel, 19, and Ashley, nine. She says her bills were anywhere between \$180 to \$200 per month before the upgrades, and she would often complain to the property manager.



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She couldn't understand why her bills were so high, especially when her sister – living in a single-family home – was only paying only \$180 for three months of energy use. For Betty, when bills were high, “instead of buying things for the kids, we would have to save for light and gas.” Now that bills are lower, Betty says she uses the additional funds to, “buy food, more fruits, milk or Cheerios, when before I had to limit it more to cover the energy bill.”

Other tenants share similar experiences, such as Berta Zometa, 37, who has two kids: eight-year-old Christopher and four-year-old David. She says she's able to save more money now that her energy costs have dropped. Similarly, Eldy Lopez—who has lived in her apartment for three years with her husband, Nelson, and three-year-old daughter, Cynthia—says that the upgrades themselves made her home more comfortable, and the ventilation has improved.

### ENERGY EFFICIENCY CREATES JOBS AND BOOSTS QUALITY OF LIFE

Projects like these improve the comfort of homes for low-income residents, and they create jobs. Construction teams via Community Housing Partners (CHP) Energy Solutions have worked with Grandview Apartments on everything from changing light bulbs, installing water-saving devices like low-flow water aerators, and making improvements to the duct system. The CHP teams seal holes and cracks in the duct system and install a return filter grill helping the HVAC system run efficiently, making homes more comfortable and making it easier for residents and maintenance staff to regularly maintain air filters. “What we're doing in Virginia is helping to cut energy use and costs overall,” says Tyler Cox, CHP construction technician. “We help save money and preserve the integrity of these homes.” What's more, Tyler enjoys what he does and understands the benefits the work is bringing to residents. “I like my job. Being a homeowner myself, I know a low utility bill is wonderful. It's less money out of the pocket.”

Today, Grandview Apartments is undergoing its final round of energy efficiency upgrades, thanks to Washington Gas, Dominion Energy Virginia, and low-income utility funds. Once completed, each of the units will have undergone an energy efficiency upgrade, and tenants will be able to enjoy savings on their monthly energy bills.

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ELDY LOPEZ AND DAUGHTER, CYNTHIA