

CASE STUDY

How energy efficiency—yes, energy efficiency—brings Virginia families closer together



CRYSTAL BARBOUR, 39, has lived at Park's Edge, a multi-building housing community, for 14 years.

Her apartment is situated on a quiet road, right across from a wooded park in Charlottesville, Virginia. She loves the location because it's right in the middle of town and her 16-year-old son, Malik, is able to walk across the street to school. Along with Malik, Crystal raised her now 20-year-old daughter Keturah at Park's Edge. Keturah is now in her third year at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA on a full-ride scholarship for basketball.

UPGRADING AGING BUILDINGS

Park's Edge was originally built in 1988, and starting in 2004, the property owners started major renovations. This included added balconies, dishwashers, central A/C, washers and dryers, windows and more. But with new features came higher energy demands. So, in 2005, through a partnership with [The Local Energy Alliance Program \(LEAP\)](#), the properties underwent energy efficiency upgrades. This meant everything from energy-efficient faucets, showerheads, attic insulation, and lighting.

Crystal remembers what it was like to pay high energy bills. She recalls that they were as high as \$135 at times – above average for Virginia – and when it came time to pay, she would often have to make hard choices such as forgoing buying basketball shoes for the kids or even groceries. “You would just eat cheap when it was electric bill week,” she says. Crystal works full time, but even so, when it came time to pay her electricity bill, she would at times have to, “make a payment arrangement or just pay what I could.”

SLASHING ENERGY BILLS

Her new attic insulation, water-efficient faucets, and showerheads have helped to change all that for her and her family. In the winter, her bills are as low as \$65. Her apartment is less drafty, and now she doesn't have to put plastic on the windows during winter months. Over the last year and half, Crystal has noticed her electric bills have been the lowest she's ever seen them. She says they stay low even during the summer, which is, “awesome.”

Luckily, having to forgo important life events, like watching her daughter play college basketball, is a thing of the past.

She says now she can spend that money on gas to attend games in Lynchburg. Her son benefits too. Malik plays recreational basketball, so now Crystal doesn't have to say, “no, you can't play this year.” Instead, he gets to play. “It helps you save, so you can do the extra things that you want to do for your kids. It does help.”

MORE TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY

Energy efficiency and programs like LEAP support upgrades that can make a world of difference for families—especially low-income families. For Crystal, it means spending more time with her kids and offering them the extracurricular activities that they need to stay healthy and happy. The benefits of energy efficiency are significant when it comes to saving money, but at the end of the day, the broader rewards are priceless.

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