

Colorado's Angelica Village

It is the spring of 2016. A spicy aroma wafts out of the kitchen of 5520 W Virginia Avenue, Lakewood. Lodrigue pats a ball of chapatti dough as big as a soccer ball. Newly arrived from Uganda, he is making his home in the Denver suburbs, riding city buses, and attending the Waldorf school. He is joined by sister Bora, a slender eighteen-year-old with a knack for preparing chicken legs boiled in oil, and by younger brother Audry, more interested in the drumming studio in the garage than in cooking. These three joined the resident community of Angelica Village in May 2016, at that time including Amy and Renata from Denver, Diaz from Honduras, Alonzo from Guatemala, and Rosie from the Pine Ridge reservation in North Dakota.



Angelica Village was born in a small farmhouse across the street, home of Anamaria, Terri, and their toddler son Aaron. When a second baby was born, the farmhouse was bursting at the seams and, in perfect timing, the second farmhouse came up for sale. With extraordinary support from the Denver anthroposophical community as well as many other interested friends and donors, this house was purchased and a new chapter began in April 2016.

The vision of Angelica Village was born in Renata's heart many years previously while still attending the Waldorf school. She carried it through college, obtaining her master's degree in social work. It was nurtured further by her practicum at the House of Peace in Ipswich, Massachusetts, a community for refugee families and adults with developmental disabilities. *[The story of the House of Peace was told in being human, summer 2013.]*

Joining the workforce in Denver, Renata's vision grew in urgency as she became painfully aware of the inadequacies of the social work system. A small support group formed to hold the intention of Angelica Village: to wel-



come those from all walks of life who want to create a community where all give what they can and receive what they need; where each individuality is held in the deepest regard and the collective strength holds all those who are engaged.

Specifically, the intention is to welcome those who have had the least opportunity to bring their full selves as a gift in this world, who have faced some of the dehumanizing experiences of violence, war, and homelessness. In the mainstream mindset, these individuals and families are seen as having little to offer the world and are placed in short term service programs which rarely serve their needs adequately. Families seeking refuge from war, individuals with special abilities, and parents who are homeless and single experience a unique set of challenges.

It is a harsh reality to recognize that all of these have been marginalized and underserved in many ways. In a world ravaged by war and displaying hostility toward those who are different, there is a growing sense of isolation for so many populations. When the strength of such individuals unites with a positive, peaceful community, the possibilities for healing and growth are immeasurable.

Communities dedicated to reversing these trends on micro and macro levels are critical. Built on the strengths of individuals from diverse backgrounds and focused on sustained relationships and mutual support, they can overcome structural oppression, celebrate differences, and work towards peace and healing. As a foundation for realizing this vision, Renata and her partner Amy trained as foster care parents for refugee youth and welcomed the first young people. Through the first year of rapid growth, they maintained full-time outside jobs while carrying out the tasks of parenting youth from diverse backgrounds. On any given day, this might include counseling, transportation, advocacy with social services and immigration, tutoring, instruction on how to ride the city buses, and driving lessons for the teenagers! All this on top of regular household tasks and particular needs like searching Craigslist for a reasonably priced set of drums for Audry and Lodrigue's musical passion, or scouring the

city for jackfruit or cassava for a Ugandan evening meal.

The Farmhouse provides a home for the youth. A duplex down the road was purchased for two families coming out of homelessness; a long two years was spent fixing them up. One became the final home for a dear partner and board member Veola, who passed on due to terminal illness. After other patchwork arrangements, two families connected to Angelica Village who expressed a desire to participate fully and reciprocally in the community are moving in and making this duplex their home.

Two more youth have joined the residential community and additional adults and children have been called to join the impulse of Angelica Village, either as residents or frequent visitors, supporting in different ways while receiving what the community has to offer. The hope is to achieve the ideal balance between the individual and the greater community presented by Rudolf Steiner in 1920:

The healthy social life is only when
In the mirror of the human soul
The whole community forms itself
And in the community lives
The strength of the individual soul.

A first grant proposal seeks funds for a music and art studio, initially for the drumset that has become a focus of interest for the young people. (They are expanding their repertoire, and branching out to perform in city venues in local churches.) Individual donors are sought to make a monthly pledge. This will fund one full-time co-worker for the many daily tasks and provide some support for transportation, paying school, educational and vocational materials, diapers, food, clothing, and more.

Angelica Village is eager to grow into its full vision including homes to welcome more individuals and families, a community garden with animals, a youth and community art and music space, and a corner store cafe. We are also eager to infuse community activities and rhythms with therapeutic offerings. All are welcome!

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