

Sarah Leswing Testimony to House General, Housing, & Military Affairs Committee

February 8, 2022

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Sara Leswing and I live in Wilder, VT. I am a recipient of the down payment assistance through the home ownership program at Twin Pines Housing Trust. Prior to purchasing my home in January 2020, I was living in a rental apartment in White River Junction, VT. As a single person with two dogs, it was always difficult to find affordable rentals in the Upper Valley. I was paying \$1,375 a month plus utilities on an annual salary of around \$48,000.

I had no plans to even think about purchasing a house because I did not have the money available to provide a down payment. Even though buying would be cheaper month to month, the initial costs of buying were out of reach. I heard about Twin Pines through a family member and decided to investigate it further. They had a home that was already in their portfolio up for resale and it was in my desired location. Unfortunately, the home was already under contract, but that was how I learned about the buyer-driven option through Twin Pines. I completed an application to see if I would even be accepted and then started to browse available listings in the Upper Valley. About five months after completing my application, I was approved for a house located in Wilder, VT. With the money received from the Vermont Housing Conservation Board, Twin Pines provided me with the 20% down payment and shared equity of the home.

Owning my own home has been a life changing experience. I have learned about the responsibility of owning a house including the constant upkeep and the unexpected repairs that arise. I have been able to save enough money with my low mortgage to have a new roof installed and upgrade the bathrooms, which I did on my own!

My true passion is in dog rescue, and with my own space, I can foster shelter dogs for White River Animal Rescue. Since living in this house I have fostered eight dogs and successfully adopted them out to new homes. Owning a house has allowed me to fulfill one of my dreams, and also give back to the community through volunteering for a non-profit.

I was born and raised in Wilder, VT and I love the area I live. I am so happy to be able to continue to live here with the help of Twin Pines and VHCB. I've been working at a local consulting firm, RSG, for over seven years, and they have supported me both with my professional and educational development. With the onset of the pandemic, having the peace of mind of stable, affordable housing has been monumental.

Working with Twin Pines has been such a great experience and I am forever grateful for their assistance. With the shared equity program, I won't fully receive all the profit when re-selling the home, but I am saving a lot of money each month and am putting the money towards equity and not directly to a landlord. My hope is that when I am ready to sell the house, I will have saved enough money to fund a down payment independently. Without the help from Twin Pines, I may have never purchased a home of my own. This program has been monumental in my personal and professional growth and believe that it's a huge asset to the community.

Thanks again for allowing me to speak with you all. I hope that you will support VHCB so more Vermonters like me can have the same opportunity to purchase their own home.