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From goat shed to chicken coop to home
The Nelsons create an unlikely haven for children—with ASP's help

The narrow road climbs past a community so tightly packed into Jones Creek Holler that telling who lives where can be difficult. Dora and Mark Nelson's home is sandwiched just above her parents' house and just below her grandmother's.

Other relatives live nearby, an extended family in every sense of the word, present for Dora as she dropped out of school at age 14, entered an abusive marriage that lasted five long years until she had the courage to leave, and then learned to trust again while reclaiming her life back in Jones Creek Holler.

ASP is welcome here, having worked on many of these homes—including Dora and Mark's. The Nelsons' house started out as a goat shed, later becoming a chicken coop, and finally storing unused items. When Dora, a divorced, 19-year-old, middle school drop-out, was laid off from her restaurant job in 1991, she began to unload, clean, and live in this structure adjacent to her parents' home ... little dreaming that it would become a haven for children—her own and others. Although she met Mark, the man she would eventually trust and marry, at church during that pivotal year, they were years away from the altar and the happy home they enjoy today.



Mark was content to wait, earning Dora's trust as he began to work on her unlikely house alongside her family. "We just went out scavenging for materials all across Harlan County," Dora recalled. "My entire family helped and so did Mark, scavenging for what we could and buying some sheet rock to make the first room. The house started out much smaller than it is now, and we worked on one room at a time."

Dora and Mark have been married 16 years now and have three children—13-year-old twins and a son, 11—but eight children stay at their home on a regular basis. The other five are children of a near relative who is alcoholic and unable to care for them. "Things just work out better if I keep some of them here—I've raised 'em," Dora says. "My mom helps out a lot, and altogether we help each other."

ASP has helped too, first in 2004 when we installed a carport roof over the Nelsons' entire house, dropped in some walls, and installed a bathroom. Thanks to this work already in place, ASP was able to assist this family further last summer: removing a rotting back room addition and then digging and installing a foundation for the enlarged and well-insulated room that replaced it, using the existing carport roof supports as framing. Additional dry wall and windows were added in a bedroom and bathroom, and interior and exterior painting was done.

When Dora's mom was diagnosed with cancer during the summer, her whole family was very sad. "We were all tore up—couldn't sleep or nothing," Dora said. "We asked all of our volunteer groups to pray. One lady asked me if there was anything she could do, and I told her to just be here for me. She told me to put Mom in God's hands and that He would move that cancer. I tried, and when Mom went back to the doctor, the cancer was gone!"

"ASP sure is good about helping, and we appreciate every bit of everything everyone did," Dora said gratefully. "We invited them to make our place their place while they were here. I still brag on them a lot, and we love that they keep in touch."

"When we first met ASP, our house was just pouring water," Dora remembered. "I had to keep mopping whenever it rained. Then ASP came along and did things I didn't know you could do. Now it looks like things are going good to me, and I appreciate every bit of what they did."

ASP founder Tex Evans saw people caught in the midst of some pretty serious life storms and invited young people to help build warmth, safety, and dryness into their homes even in the midst of these storms. Early ASP volunteers scavenged for almost any materials available, much as Dora's family did—even straightening used nails to use again. Yet today, with the assistance of over 240,000 volunteers from across the nation, ASP has repaired more than 12,500 homes throughout Central Appalachia.

Thank you for your prayers, your financial contributions, in-kind donations, and volunteer service—each such a necessary provision for helping ASP continue to assist Central Appalachian families in need. Your prayers and gifts now mean that ASP can continue to offer both assistance and hope to families in need this winter. Such assistance often seems an answer to their prayers so please give now as God leads you.

Thank you.