

Vista Verde welcomes its first residents



BACKGROUND

This case study explores how a TCC-funded affordable housing development, Vista Verde Apartments, has benefited the lives of low-income households, as told through the lens of three individuals: Diana Colado, María Zaragoza, and Norma De La Cruz. The case study also spotlights how Ontario's community engagement efforts raised awareness around the opportunity. For more information about the benefits of Vista Verde, see [page 62](#); and for more about Ontario's community engagement work, see [page 46](#).

Interviews for this story were conducted in June 2021.

Diana Colado and her three youngest children inside their new unit at Vista Verde Apartments. Photo credit: Diana Colado

DIANA COLADO is a single mother of four children, with ages ranging from 5 to 17, who has been living in Ontario for the past 15 years. After separating from her children's father, Colado lacked the income to get a place of her own. She and her kids moved in with her mother, where they shared a single room. While she enjoyed having her children near their grandmother, Colado was eager to find a bigger space with more privacy to allow her and her kids to focus on their educational and professional goals.

Colado first learned about the opportunity to live in one of the TCC-funded affordable housing units at Vista Verde Apartments through a Facebook announcement posted by Ontario Together's community engagement team. Colado was concerned about how quickly she could complete the application process while juggling her child care responsibilities, but the community engagement team reassured her that the housing opportunity was not first-come, first-served, and that there would be a lottery to allow prospective tenants ample time to prepare their applications. Colado applied and would eventually become one of the 100 applicants — among a pool of more than 3,000 — to make it through the lottery and final screening process.

Living at Vista Verde has benefited the Colado family in a number of ways. From a financial perspective, Colado is

paying less rent than when she was living with her mother, who plans to get a replacement housemate to compensate for Colado's departure. With her savings, Colado has been able to invest in making her new apartment a home. She purchased a dining table and extra beds so that everyone has their own dedicated sleeping area. After a challenging period, it is now easier for her kids to be kids. The contrast is particularly notable for Colado when they're out playing together at the park or on-site pool, amenities which were inaccessible at their last spot.

“Before moving to Vista Verde, I didn't have access to a private bedroom or a closet; we all lived in a single room. I feel blessed to now have a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, and two separate bedrooms.... My kids finally have space to make their own.”

DIANA COLADO

Colado hopes to further her education by going to nursing school, a dream she has held for a while, but that she hasn't had the time to pursue. With her housing finally stabilized, Colado is feeling ready to focus on that dream. The proximity of Vista Verde to a nearby elementary school will also allow her to spend less time commuting on behalf of her kids and more time kick-starting her new career.



María Zaragoza and her daughter on their new balcony, overlooking the pool at Vista Verde. Photo credit: María Zaragoza

“My kids now have space to play outside, at the park, at the pool.... In our last apartment, they couldn’t go out; there was nothing to entertain them. We didn’t even have a patio.”

MARÍA ZARAGOZA

MARÍA ZARAGOZA is a single mother of three children, with ages ranging from 3 to 17, who landed at Vista Verde after years of struggling to afford the rent in Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic made matters worse for Zaragoza, as she spent much of the pandemic furloughed from her job at a local ice cream shop. The drop in income motivated her to look for resources in the community that could help her make ends meet. When Zaragoza’s neighbor told her about the lottery for housing at Vista Verde, she applied and hoped for the best.

Within a month of moving into Vista Verde, Zaragoza has already noted an improvement in her mental health and that of her children. Like Colado, Zaragoza says that her children are ecstatic about the recreational amenities such as the park and pool. Such amenities were not available at her last place, even though she paid \$200 more per month. Meanwhile, Zaragoza feels less stressed about the rent and can focus on her personal goals, such as learning English, getting a new job, and eventually owning her own home.

NORMA DE LA CRUZ and her husband also struggled to make rent before moving into Vista Verde. De La Cruz, a mother of two (ages 11 and 17), has lived in Ontario for over 20 years and commented that her rent seems to go up every six months, most recently by \$100. Like Colado and Zaragoza, De La Cruz and her husband were eager to line up housing that they could better afford.

De La Cruz eventually learned about Vista Verde through her job as a resident leader, known locally as a “promotora.” As a resident leader, De La Cruz shares resources within her community about various city programs, including Ontario Together. Thus, when the application process for Vista Verde opened up, De La Cruz was tasked with helping spread the word to Ontario residents, which included herself. Through her outreach work, De La Cruz was well aware that demand for housing at Vista Verde would likely exceed supply, but she applied anyway and had the good fortune to secure a unit through the lottery.

Before living at Vista Verde, De La Cruz said, she and her husband rarely had leftover income to put into savings. Now, she’s looking forward to building up a nest egg to buy a home. First, however, De La Cruz plans to take her family on a vacation, something they haven’t been able to financially justify in a very long time.



Norma De La Cruz entering her new apartment. Photo credit: Norma De La Cruz

“I used to have to choose between groceries and rent, now we can live more comfortably.... For example, we can afford to eat more vegetarian and shop more organic.”

NORMA DE LA CRUZ