We celebrated **20 years of ministry** by celebrating the people who *are* East Central Ministries. 105 photo-voices hang on the wall of our community room! They represent the countless people who have been a part of this community over 20 years. Our friend, Richard Brandt, painted a River of Life on the wall as our timeline and backdrop for our stories. My story began like this:

> In the fall of 1998 while stuccoing a straw bale wall at my house, I saw a vision of myself walking on Central Avenue talking to people. That vision was a seed for what was to be created. There were always more questions than answers, but slowly relationships, ideas, and structures started to form into an organization committed to the peace and wholeness of our East Central neighborhoods...

Preparing for the November anniversary open house was a meaningful process of reconnecting with people, hearing their stories, and remembering and celebrating where we’ve come from and all the different things we’ve done—some with wild success, others with enthusiastic failure. Over the years, thousands of people have come seeking connection and conversations. People have donated and volunteered, learning with us the beauty and struggle of community. Some have stayed with us for years, and others have blown in and out like the wind. Together we shared food, played with and tutored kids, provided and received affordable health care, strategized solutions for systemic problems, and picked up discarded needles in the street. We have sold, bartered, grown, built, and sustained things together.

These 20 years have been a living laboratory of learning how to love God and love our neighbor. We’ve kept our theology simple and practical. Scripture is clear that we cannot love a God we don’t see, if we do not love the people in front of us that we *can* see. **So we try to love each person in front of us, practice humility and curiosity as we learn from one another, and help everyone feel like they belong.** It is an honor to lead ECM—to be a part of and invite others into a vision of beloved community, where all are valued, loved, and included.

*John Bulten: Founder and Executive Director*
Pathways is East Central Ministries’ intensive case management program. I am a Certified Community Health Worker who works with anyone who needs case management and resources to be a healthier community member. The beautiful clients I work with are mostly people experiencing homelessness and are suffering from addiction and mental illness. The clients and I work together to help them obtain IDs, housing, healthcare, and any other resource that will help them lead better lives. Some of the clients who have homes often need help with utilities, clothing, and rental assistance.

This is the second time I have worked in the International District, I also taught at La Mesa Elementary School for many years. I have had the opportunity to work with some of my former students, who are now adults. I love this neighborhood, and I was very happy to have an opportunity to come back and work here after leaving teaching. The community has changed in the six years I had been gone. There are more homeless people trying to survive on the streets than I’ve ever seen in Albuquerque.

I love my clients and treat them as gently and lovingly as possible. I get such joy when someone accomplishes something such as becoming clean off of drugs or finds a home. I see lots of progress, but I also see many people unable to quite get back on their feet or stuck in the cycle of being incarcerated over and over. Although it may take some people longer than others because of circumstances, I see people who want nothing more than to be seen as human, no different than me or you. My job is a mixture of heartache and joy, but when a client hugs me tightly and thanks me, it fills my heart with love.

Eva Vasquez: Pathways Navigator, Certified Community Health Worker

Mi experiencia es muy hermosa y muy bonita. Con mucho cariño y mucho amor se siente como una familia especial.

My experience with the Food Co-op and East Central Ministries has been very nice and beautiful. With a lot of love that they give me, we all feel like a very special family.

Wendy Valdez: Youth Programs, Food Co-op
In 2007, ECM helped start a middle school called Escuela Luz del Mundo, where my sister attended. There I was introduced to ECM’s after school program where they help kids with homework. I was only 6 years old at the time. In 2008, my family moved to Casa Shalom, a housing community also started by ECM. Throughout the years I have been a part the kids’ program, high school internship, attended some cooking classes and recently worked as a college intern as the assistant for the summer youth program. I grew up going to the programs, and being around such positive and selfless people really helped shape who I am today. ECM has taught me that even the little things matter when we do it with love. Volunteering at the thrift store, helping with gardening, and all the other things we did were so much fun, and we were able to help others while doing so. I appreciate little things that if it weren’t for ECM, I probably wouldn’t even care about. This year, I also became part of the Southeast Collaborative, six organizations coming together to help better the International District, and I am very proud to be a part of that change. I’ve learned so many things and I’m super excited for what the future has in store for us!

Carolina Martinez: Youth Programs, Casa Shalom, Collaborative Grant

While I was on a road trip in the US, a friend in Wisconsin gave me an information sheet about East Central Ministries, knowing my interest in inner city expressions of the Kingdom of God. As I read it, tears streamed down my face. I determined to go and see it, and on my next US trip in 2010, I arranged a visit. Was I impressed, blessed, and made to feel at home? Wow, yes! Staying at Casa Shalom and connecting deeply with John was a real blessing, and return visits have always confirmed God connected us. What a joy to see one answer to, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth.” Thank you Father.

Martin Young: Bristol, England

My name is Ruben, and I connected with ECM back in 2006 as a small group leader with JUNTOS (The Navigators I-58 Ministry). Becky invited me to be a part of the Youth Group and help with tutoring in the after school program, and I haven’t looked back since! I have been in and out of ECM for the past 13 years and have been part of the youth programs, One Hope Clinic, and most recently the SE Collaborative. I love being a part of an organization that doesn’t just talk about restorative justice and helping out the community they are involved with, but are walking the talk. I love being a part of it.

Ruben Duran: Youth Programs, One Hope Clinic, Collaborative Grant
I’ve been a part of ECM since 2012; at first part-time, but then moving into what is called the Pennsylvania House (former ELM school) in 2013. Since then, I have been a full-time volunteer. What continues to amaze me is the fact that everyone who is a part of this community can and does get along so well, and strives to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Intentional Community. **It’s a daily walking in love** toward your fellow workers and having a heart for those who share your neighborhood with you. No day is ever exactly the same.

Sarah Upton, PhD: University of Texas El Paso

Building community—practicing justice and compassion together—is what we are called to do as the people of ECM. As 2019 comes to a close, here are some practical ways that you can join us or help us:

- **Financially!** This summer we had two ministry supporters forgive loans of $56,000 to our Casa Shalom Housing Co-op. These were wonderful gifts that I would like to match by the end of this year—we are raising money to hire someone to increase the capacity and sustainability of our Health Center!
- Donate new underwear and socks, and gently used coats, hats, and gloves for our unhoused neighbors
- Volunteer at the Common Good Thrift Store—especially Saturdays and occasional furniture donation pickups
- Volunteer to help with small maintenance projects
- Pray for us daily

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“LET’S GO!” ECM Zumba