



“Seeing the veterans get something that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to get because of DTE’s help is very humbling.”

—LAURA HERFY, FOUNDER AND  
CEO OF PEOPLE OF IMPACT





# Making an impact

DTE program helps upgrade housing for veterans.

Because of energy efficiency upgrades, People of Impact is seeing savings on its energy bill

Nestled on 5 acres at the edge of Freedom Lake in Lapeer Township, People of Impact is a safe haven for veterans struggling to get back on their feet. The gorgeous property provides vets with transitional living, job placement, educational opportunities and recreation, from fishing and gardening to beekeeping and skeet shooting.

The nonprofit is driven by donations and the passion of its founder and CEO, Laura Herfy, who was inspired after a life-threatening accident left her paralyzed and grasping for purpose.

“While I was lying in bed, I prayed about it,” she says. “I always liked to give back, and my heart and soul were always drawn to helping veterans.”

DTE’s Multifamily Program offered a complimentary energy assessment and provided rebates for the installation of energy-efficient upgrades in four housing units on the property, making them more comfortable for the veterans residing there and more affordable for the organization to

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*Nonprofit People of Impact in Lapeer Township helps veterans with transitional housing, job placement, education and recreation.*



operate. The rebates offered by the program saved money up front, and the upgrades themselves will contribute to long-term savings on energy costs.

People of Impact received nearly \$120,000 in rebates.

“That’s money we can use to help the veterans specifically, and if it wasn’t for DTE’s help, that wouldn’t even be possible,” Herfy says.

### From tragedy to triumph

Herfy, a former reserve police officer for the city of Madison Heights, was living in Arizona and pursuing a Ph.D. when she suffered a 100-foot fall off a cliff while canyoneering. The accident severed her spine and left her unable to walk. Herfy credits a divine miracle, along with lots of hard work and rehabilitation, for helping her regain mobility. With renewed drive to pursue something meaningful in her life, she launched People of Impact.

“I have quite a few family members and friends that are veterans that, unless you’re surrounded by their world, you don’t really understand the challenges they face,” she says. “They leave service and a lot of them don’t have anybody – no resources, no family, no one.”

People of Impact provides resort-style living with the goal of housing 25 veterans once it is fully established. In exchange for a year of room and board, vets must adhere to a strict routine that includes chores, community service, and school or work requirements. Herfy is responsible for raising funds or covering expenses out of her own pocket.

She learned about DTE’s Multifamily Program through Michigan’s Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. After Herfy connected with the DTE Multifamily Program team, the property was enrolled in DTE’s energy-saving Multifamily Income-Qualified Program.

### About DTE’s program

The DTE Multifamily Program encourages property owners, managers, housing authorities, low-income property funding recipients, contractors, builders,



With help from DTE,  
People of Impact  
installed new lighting,  
water heaters, mini-split  
heat pumps and more.

and developers of new and existing buildings to make energy-efficient upgrades by offering various rebates.

The program includes a comprehensive walk-through energy assessment to educate property managers on energy-saving opportunities and available rebates. The assessment report offers recommendations on where to begin and how to take advantage of DTE's energy efficiency programs.

In the case of People of Impact, a DTE energy advisor visited the site and found energy-saving opportunities within the four existing apartments. Upgrades included mini-split heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, attic air sealing and insulation, and LED lighting. The newly installed mini-splits provided air conditioning to the housing units for the first time. Also, the program offered rebates for qualified health and safety upgrades to ensure safety for the tenants.

"Now the veterans are living in the lap of luxury. It's amazing," Herfy says. "I had no idea that there was help out there, but it was a blessing."

### The road to healing

Isaac Walsh, who served nearly nine years in the Navy Reserve, says People of Impact helps veterans recover from the stresses of serving in the military.

"Here, it's secluded; it's very quiet. Veterans can get back to nature and begin to heal," says Walsh, who serves as People of Impact's board chairman.

Sreen Dababneh, who leads the DTE Multifamily Program, says DTE was happy to help People of Impact.

"Honoring their service and sacrifices and supporting an organization that helps them gain employment, start businesses and access essential services, it all aligns with DTE's mission to strengthen communities," she says.

Making energy-efficient upgrades helps contribute to veterans' quality of life as well as the organization's bottom line. For that, Herfy is grateful.

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### TOOLBOX

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