

Moving Forward by LEAPs and Bounds

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Talented Nonprofit 2023

LEAP Housing

What happens when you bring together a group of knowledgeable, talented real estate agents intent on creating more opportunities for people in Boise to become homeowners? The result is LEAP Housing, a Boise-based nonprofit and the 2023 winner of the Idaho Philanthropy Day Talented Nonprofit Award.

A housing nonprofit, LEAP came into being when a local realtor saw too many people unable to access safe, stable and affordable housing. That realtor is LEAP's energetic CEO and founder, Bart Cochran. Bart started the organization after a decade in real estate, and while he hadn't set out to start a nonprofit, he realized it was the best way he could help people.

Bart had been searching for a way to give back like he'd seen medical professionals do in other countries, but didn't feel like he had any relevant skills to contribute. As Bart put it, "I didn't recognize that my real estate skills were that valuable for helping the most vulnerable in our community."

It wasn't until he learned more about affordable housing that he realized how he could serve his community well. Taking stock of his experience in real estate, Bart asked: "What if we took the business model and skills and repositioned them and focused on an audience that isn't getting that support and connection?"



From there, LEAP Housing was born, helping to fill gaps in affordable housing services. LEAP has taken its vast knowledge base in real estate and brought it to the nonprofit world. As Bart said, "So much of what we do is what we were doing in the for-profit sphere, and just applying that to the nonprofit model to help people access housing."



*How do we take a limited amount of resources and deploy them in the way we can have **the greatest impact?***

Through their innovative approach to affordable housing, LEAP is helping to build creative housing solutions, like the LEAP Housing Trust. It creates opportunities for homeownership for households who would otherwise be unable to purchase a home. To date, LEAP has sold 14 homes to households at or below 80% AMI. Many of these households are special-needs, with at least one member experiencing mental or physical impairment, recovering from physical abuse, recovering from substance abuse, persons with HIV/AIDS, or older adults.

Bart and the LEAP team frequently ask themselves, "How do we take a limited amount of resources and deploy them in the way we can have the greatest impact?" Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, LEAP is proactive about connecting with other local nonprofits.

They work alongside CATCH and Jesse Tree, two other housing nonprofits in Boise, to find out how each organization can best support its community. "Collaboration is critical for us," Bart said. "We don't live in a silo. We try to figure out what lane we're in because having focus helps us figure out how we can help."

Bart sees LEAP as a piece of the larger affordable housing puzzle.

"We don't believe any of this can be solved unless we come together to create housing that's available to all Idahoans," Bart said. "I picture it as a puzzle: LEAP is only a couple of the puzzle pieces. It takes all of these pieces to create solutions."



Bart added, "When we focus more energy on the piece we feel we're good at, that allows us to become better at it. Interactions with our peers help us figure out where there's a hole, then find out who can best fill it and send referrals in their direction. Defining the pieces that we are experts in strengthens the whole ecosystem and prevents us from providing services that another organization is already providing. Housing opportunities is our lane—creating as many housing opportunities as we possibly can in the community."

*What skills and resources do you already have? What can you contribute? With just a small amount of creativity, **there's a spot for everybody.***

Learning that LEAP had won the Talented Nonprofit Award was “very exciting for us,” Bart said. “It’s pretty special.”

What advice does Bart give other folks who are looking for ways to best serve their community?

“Refer to asset-based community development: what skills and resources do you already have? What can you contribute? With just a small amount of creativity, there’s a spot for everybody.”

Thanks to LEAP’s creativity, more people in Boise are able to access safe, affordable housing. And the organization is just getting started. As Bart said, “Our goal is 1,000 by 2026.”



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Idaho’s philanthropy initiatives are growing rapidly. What role do small local organizations play in driving this forward?

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