Sarah’s story:

The idea for the Northwest Neighborhood Community Center (NNC Center) came about because the local community identified a need for a space where neighbors could access various activities and resources. Their mission is to create a safe space for neighbors to gather, grow, and build relationships. “In the immediate surrounding community, there was a lack of public space and green space. People want a place that isn’t directly tied to a church or school. And it should be community driven, that is most important.” says Sarah. From talking to folks in the neighborhood, Sarah is building a list of sorts to gain a better understanding of what the community wants and needs. In what was originally a resource center in the 1960’s, the NNC Center has a full industrial kitchen, can host exercise classes, as well as job and computer training workshops and is located on the same lot as Crosswinds Community Church.

Sarah started in her position as director of the NNC Center in September 2016. With the help of church staff, they started filing paperwork for tax-exempt status in August and are hoping to be finished by January of 2017. A lot of those offering assistance or advice in this process were people from established partnerships, many of which already offer services in the neighborhood. These partners include: Truth and Love Counseling, Clean Slate soup kitchen, Jump 4 Joy Squad, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Overeaters Anonymous.

Outside of some cosmetic updating and ADA compliance requirements, most of the current challenges have been with settling on a clear direction for the NNC Center. According to Sarah, “Most community centers are niche based, so there weren’t a lot of good comparative models for what we hope to see happen through the NNC Center.” And, of course, funding. The NNC Center hopes to continue gaining community partners throughout town that will help financially support this as well as secure some grant funding. Currently, the board consists of members from the business team at Crosswinds Community Church. She hopes to build her own “launch team” that will be equal parts neighbors and community members. That team will then ideally transition into her board.

Her advice to others:

• Have some sort of framework in place around the identified need to help validate your work.
• Have a team! It can feel lonely in the beginning.
• Don’t go into this type of endeavor without some funding support.
• Asset based work is so crucial.