

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you how affordable housing changed my life.

But first, I want to take you back many years. I was a single mother. I worked a low wage job, usually 7 days a week. I was barely making it. My friend told me about an advertisement in the newspaper for Section 8. I didn't know what section 8 was, but learned it would help me pay rent.

Applications were going to be accepted for one day only. And the advertisement said they would give out a limited number of applications which had to be turned in complete that same day.

It was a cold March morning. Well actually it was still night. It was 2 am, when I got in line. I asked a neighbor to babysit for me because applications would not be handed out until 8 am, and there were people ahead of me in line. I was hopeful that I would be able to complete all the necessary tasks and get my application in on time that day. When I finally received my application, I found that I was missing a couple of pieces of documentation. This was concerning because I had no car of my own and had to take the bus to get the missing documentation and be sure to get back in time to turn in my application. Fortunately, I was able to get that accomplished and was placed on the waiting list for rental assistance.

I then waited over two years for my name to reach the top of the list. I want you to understand how hard things were for me during those two years. I continued to work, pay for childcare and rides, rent, household bills, etc. I bought a junky car with my tax return, but it always broke down. I still remember push starting that thing and popping the clutch. It was so hard. I was earning \$5.00 an hour. I paid \$2.00 an hour for childcare and \$4.00 a day for rides. If you think about it I was actually losing money for the first two hours I worked. But I pressed on. I honestly don't know how I made it. After rides and daycare, all I had enough for was rent. I did get foodstamps so that helped. I had to carefully budget for EVERYTHING. I'm not kidding. Toilet paper, laundry soap, dish soap. EVERYTHING! I mean really, I had nothing left after rent and childcare. Buying my child a toy at the Dollar Store or some dollar store hair conditioner was a BIG DEAL! I had to think twice before running the washing machine or even the heater. And just one small problem could really do me in. I mean a sick kid needing something so simple as Motrin was a serious issue.

Finally, I received that wonderful letter. "Your name has reached the top of the waiting list". Hooray!!! Finally some help. My rent was now affordable. I can honestly say, everything changed for me. I enrolled in a program called the Family Self Sufficiency program that was offered through my housing authority. I began to feel better about myself and my skills due to that program. I remember prior to the program, I would enter the office and think, I could do what they do, but I'm just not good enough. Well the FSS program really showed me my potential. I was also used to living on such a tight budget and continued to do so. I was able to save up and get a decent car. That car allowed me to travel a little farther for work and I got a good job.

Soon I no longer needed the assistance of the housing authority. And I was able to purchase the actual home that I was previously renting with my Housing Choice Voucher.

I am so fortunate now that I get to work to serve families like myself. I can tell you that I may have made poor choices in my life that put me in the position of needing help. There was even a time in my

life that all of my belongings were in a backpack and I went couch to couch trying to find my way in life. But thankfully for the Housing Choice Voucher program, I was able to find my way to a successful future for myself and my children. I believe that affordable housing does the same thing every day for our community members. If you think about costs today, workers making minimum wage are in even worse shape than I was in. Rents are staggering. I don't know how I made it then, and it's harder now. I hope my story has shown some light on what we are working on and gives encouragement to all of you to know that we are working on more than just affordable housing solutions, we really can make a huge difference in our community.

Now I'd like to introduce Victoria Rogers, to share another success story that starts with affordable housing.