

## It's Not Just a House; It's Our Home

Barbara Nelson knows what it means to live in the depths of despair. After years of battling drug addiction and enduring repeated verbal, physical and emotional abuse from the father of her children and the man she loved, the Kansas City woman finally said “No More!” She went to a United Way-funded domestic violence shelter, choosing homelessness over the abuse she had endured for years. She left for her own safety but more importantly, for the safety of her children. It was a bold move that changed her life dramatically.

Barbara says, “At Hope House they told me it’s not O.K. for a man to hit you. I thought he hit me because he cared about me, but they taught me that this is not love.” Barbara and her three children spent a total of six months at Hope House. They tried to return home several times, but each attempted reconciliation ended in violence, until Barbara finally realized their relationship just wasn’t going to work.

Hope House and the five other domestic violence shelters funded by United Way aren’t intended to solve long-term housing needs; they are designed to serve as temporary emergency shelters for women in crisis. There is a constant stream of new victims and their families seeking a safe place to stay. The staff at Hope House suggested Barbara see if there was room for her and her children in the family emergency shelter at reStart, Inc., another program funded by United Way. Her situation was complicated by the fact one of her daughters had special needs due to cerebral palsy, seizures and asthma.

The staff at reStart welcomed them. In addition to offering a safe, stable place for Barbara and her children to live, they encouraged Barbara to do something about her addiction to drugs. “I wanted to quit, but I couldn’t without help from them. I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wanted to be the mother I used to be. I love my kids and decided it would be better for both them and me.”

Barbara went through a six-month treatment program at reStart aimed at helping her kick her drug habit and regain her self-esteem. It included group meetings and individual counseling sessions. “They taught me a lot. They helped me stop using and get my life back on track as far as paying my bills and managing my money. They clearly cared about me and my children; they were always there for me.”

Not only did they help Barbara face her drug habit, they also helped her find a steady job as a home health aide at a local health care agency. Barbara did so well, that when reStart had an opening in one of its transitional living houses, she and her children were selected to move in. They were in the transitional shelter for 1½ years before moving into a rent-subsidized house. But the best was yet to come.

One day Barbara received a call from one of her caseworkers at reStart asking if they could submit her name for consideration to receive a home that Jackson County was giving away to a worthy family that had been homeless. It was a former drug house that drug offenders had refurbished as part of their court-imposed community service program. Barbara said yes, she’d be glad to apply. Before she knew what was happening, she was handed the keys and told that the house was hers. She calls it “the happiest day of my life.” She has no mortgage but pays \$300 a month for taxes, insurance, a home maintenance policy and a home security system. She hasn’t missed a payment in two years.

Looking back on all the good things that have happened to her, Barbara says, “I’m so blessed and thankful for reStart, Hope House and all the programs that were there for us. I didn’t realize they were funded by United Way. If I could personally thank every United Way donor, I would. You definitely kept us going. I can’t even tell you how much I appreciate it. You helped me and my daughters more than you’ll ever know.”



Barbara Nelson proudly stands in front of her Kansas City home with daughters Kyessa and DeBorah. They have come a long way since being helped by a United Way-funded homelessness prevention program several years ago.



Barbara loves cooking dinner for her family. She says having her own kitchen in her own home is truly a blessing from the Lord.