



HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

This is part three in a series following the housing journey of a Kentucky woman and her children who are using an ESG Housing Voucher. ESG (Emergency Solutions Grant) is a program administered by HHCK that assists individuals and families quickly regain stability in permanent housing after experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness.

Revisiting Tatum after a month's pause, our phone call was a deliriously sleepy - but joyful - one. "We're trying to get back on track with the new baby here - we had a pretty good day-to-day rhythm going there for a while", she says of her family dynamic, which now includes her brand new daughter. Tatum's three other children, all in school, have settled cozily, almost effortlessly, into their new rental home, paid for by an Emergency Services Grant (ESG) that covers 100% of her rental costs for at least one year. "I'm so tired", she laughs. "I feel like I am going as fast as I can all day, and when it's time to sleep, she needs to eat, so I'm going during that, too."

Tatum has the luck of living within a couple minutes' walk from her childrens' elementary school. In the mornings, she gets everyone fed, dressed, and out the door, delivered to school, and returns home. She recently - just before the birth of her new baby - completed job training through a program administered by Goodwill Industries, and is hopeful to return to school, as well. "Right now, for me, it's all about sticking to the routine, staying on track. It's hard to not want to fall back into some of my old habits", she admits. "I think about how easy it would be to just be the 'Old Tatum' again, not have any goals or plans, but I've come this far... I don't want to waste all that I - that we, the kids have been a huge part of it - have accomplished. I have to stay focused, stay positive."

Fleeing domestic violence and homelessness, Tatum has, in fact, come a long way. A strong individual herself, she also credits her best friend and local community and church support groups with her success. "My best friend, she's incredible. She helps me so much with my older kids, and she reminds me to keep focused, keep on track. She reminds me that 'Old Tatum' is not who I am, and that I can't go back to that." Tatum and her friend have similar childhood backgrounds, fraught with instability and difficult periods. "I think having that stuff in common helps us keep each other in check and strong. Neither of us wants to return to times like that, or raise our kids in situations like that." Tatum also lauds her local church group for mothers of surprise, unplanned pregnancies. "Before - when I first found out I was pregnant - I had no hope. No idea how I would make it through this. But that group has helped me be more confident as a parent, as a mom - they have meetings once a week and they feed the kids so we can do group therapy together as moms and work through the issues we all seem to have... it's been such a lifeline...it's almost hard to explain." Adding to her list of support services, Tatum credits the



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ESG program greatly, as well. “Not having to worry about rent and not being homeless or in a shelter, trying to crash on couches - having this home that I know we can stay in, form good habits and routines in, bedtimes, breakfast - all of that. I honestly have no idea how I’d make it without [ESG] it. It has been the base of all the good progress me and the kids have made, this house, this program.”

Looking ahead to summer, Tatum wisely acknowledges that more challenges lie ahead with the kids being out of school all summer. “The schedule we’ve worked on will change again, and I know that’s going to be a hurdle for us. I try to nap a little right now when she [the new baby] sleeps before school is out, so with the kids home, it might be harder? I don’t know - we’ve made it this far, and we’ll figure it all out together. Being housed - that being the one thing I don’t have to worry about right now, though - talk about a load off. As long as we are in this good, safe home, I feel like the rest is all stuff that will work out the way it should.”