



HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

This is part two 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.

5 o'clock is most definitely supper time - in this case, chicken nuggets - at Tatum's house. "Mommy I can see the nuggets and they are cooking!" shrieked her 5 year old daughter, who, with precision focus, was watching them bake in the oven. "Honey I know, they're not ready yet. We have to wait", Tatum explained patiently, holding the phone away from her ear. "Just a little while longer - hang in there, ok?" Coming back to the conversation, "chicken nugget night is a big hit around here", she laughed.

It has been almost exactly one month since we spoke last, and a lot has gone on during that time for Tatum and her busy young family. "The baby - well, the baby is due just in a few more weeks", she explained. "I'm excited, and the kids are all pretty ready, too. It'll be a big change for us, but we're looking forward to it for sure".

Tatum is in her second full month living in a house funded with an ESG voucher. "The stability this has created for us is hard to explain", she offered, busily shuffling around in the kitchen, answering questions her children lobbed at her periodically as she prepared supper. "You can't imagine what it was like trying to get them ready for school when we were in the shelter. You just can't imagine. There was no routine - you can't have a routine with three kids in a homeless shelter, it's impossible." The family - Tatum and her three children, with one on the way - lived for almost a full year in a women's shelter as they fled a domestic violence scenario. "You can't get any peace, you can't get your thoughts together or plan or create any sort of good habits", Tatum discussed. "I was grateful to finally be safe, don't get me wrong, but outside of that, it was so depressing and hard to be a good mom. Getting the kids ready and off to school was awful, and sometimes I would go back to the shelter and just lie down for hours - I didn't have the motivation or confidence to work on things that were healthy for us."

Moving into the home with her children, Tatum says, has been a game changer for the entire family. "The mornings are the best time. The kids hear me get up and put the TV on and start making breakfast. They all get up, wake up, brush teeth - all that regular stuff. We eat and get dressed, and it is so peaceful. Chaotic sometimes", she added with a laugh, "but peaceful. At the shelter there were random people everywhere, very little privacy, and we were all in the one room together. This is just wonderful, the way we can take our time and start the day off so



HOMELESS & HOUSING COALITION OF KENTUCKY

positively.” Her oldest and now middle children are in regular sessions with counselors now, too. “My oldest started his counseling a little while ago, when we first moved. Now my middle [child] is going, too, and you can tell such a big difference in them both. Having this home, this peaceful space, has made all that possible.” While they were living in the shelter, the middle child was struggling academically to the point of bringing home all Fs one report card. “Now”, she explained, with the joy in her voice over the phone coming through as clear as day,”now on her last card, it was all As and Bs! Having this space - you just can’t imagine how good it has been for them...and there’s even proof like this.”

Tatum’s children aren’t the only ones thriving. Tatum recently completed work-ready training through Goodwill, earning her RISE certificate, and is working with a career coach through the same program to help start the job search. She’s taken soft skills classes, to brush up on her office preparedness, and is hopeful, after 60 hours of training, to get a position doing peer support counseling to help other young women in similar situations. She’s joined some community and church groups, too, to help get acquainted with other young families in town, and get help with child care. “I don’t feel so alone”, she said, referring to the groups she has joined. “It’s not so hard anymore.” Ultimately, Tatum wants to return to college and finish her Psychology degree. She continued, “As soon as we moved into this house, everything started happening so fast in a good way. When one thing happens, something else happens, and it’s all been so positive for all of us. You just can’t imagine where we were, and where we are now.”

With a baby on the way shortly, Tatum revels in the luxury they’ll have in having room for them all to live together comfortably. “Where would I put a baby in our shelter space, you know?” she mused. “Nowhere. We didn’t have room for anything, definitely not another whole person and all the stuff.” Laughing as she considered the impossibility of the massive amounts of storage babies tend to require, she added, “and it was so sad thinking about it, too. Bringing a new baby to a shelter. It was bad enough, demoralizing, having my other kids there. They were embarrassed, and felt so bad, so helpless. But now...now we’re doing great. I am so proud of myself, too!”, Tatum beamed. “I have them fed and ready and at school by 8, then I get myself home, make coffee, and get ready for the rest of my day. It’s been a crazy road that led us here, but we’re making it. We’ve got this house, we’re safe, and we’re making it.”