

A Real Home: Gabriel's Family Journey Out of Homelessness

Written by Karah Van Kammen

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by Candy Thompson

A van in a parking lot is not what most families would call home. But at the time, it was the only option for Daisy, her husband and their four young boys. When she looked at her children scrunched up in the back of the van, she felt the stab of emotional pain as any loving mother would.

"Sleeping in the van broke my heart," Daisy recalled. "The kids didn't understand what was going on. They would always ask, 'When are we going to bed?' Going to sleep in the van wasn't going to bed."

Like many homeless families, their crisis began with a single unforeseen event. Her husband lost a good-paying job at College America. When they couldn't make the rent on their apartment, they were evicted, with nowhere to go.

"Everything went downhill from there."

They moved around at night to different parking lots, worried the police would tell them to move.

To make matters even worse, they lost most of their possessions in storage to flooding.

"It was really stressful." The children paid a price. While they were homeless, her oldest boy, David, missed kindergarten. His next youngest brother, Gabriel, grew sullen and angry. He threw tantrums. Daisy knew deep down this was no way for her precious boys to grow up. They needed a real home. A New Leaf gave them that.

In late 2014, Daisy and her family found their way to A New Leaf and La Mesita Apartments. Finally, the start of something that looked like hope.

"If it wasn't for A New Leaf and the donors, we'd still be living out of our van. Getting here to La Mesita was our Christmas present." Daisy said.

La Mesita has 80 units of affordable housing, with 30 reserved for those who are homeless. It offers an umbrella of support services, including case

management, goal setting, referrals, a computer lab which is an [Arizona@Work Access](#) Point, and a Health and Wellness Center. For children, there are the

After School and Head Start programs.

"Life seems more stable and the boys feel it. They have been involved in so many campus activities. It's been so good for them," Daisy said.

Christine Frank, lead teacher for the After School program, watches both boys blossom each day. "Gabriel just loves it in here. He is in kindergarten now, but he is doing first grade work. He's one of our pride and joys. David is very artistic. I saw him smile for the first time after one of our field trips."

Today Daisy goes to work at a local motel and to a second job through a temporary employment agency. She is also enrolled in GED classes to

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obtain her high school degree.

"Life is so much better now. It's really good. I'm thankful for the support they give us here. If it wasn't for A New Leaf and its donors, we'd still be living out of our van. It's a miracle for our family."

Thanks to A New Leaf supporters, her family not only has a home, they have a future.

AZ Foothills has partnered with the comprehensive, non-profit, and human service agency, [A New Leaf](#), for an incredibly special series; one that is very near and dear to our organization's heart. **"Telling Untold Stories"** will illustrate multi-dimensional and raw stories of real men, women, and families within our communities who have been dealt a tricky hand of cards. These stories are ones of despair - ones of defeat - and, ones of fear. However, these stories become ones of faith - ones of determination - and, ones of hope.

When someone is in an abusive relationship or homeless, they often find themselves struggling to find help, not aware of the community resources available to them. A New Leaf is one of those critical resources. The agency has been a beacon of hope, supporting women and men who experience domestic violence and homelessness.

The mission of A New Leaf is Helping Families...Changing Lives. A New Leaf inspires and supports individuals and families in their journey to lifelong independence. The agency operates Autumn House, a domestic violence facility in the East Valley, as well as Faith House, a domestic violence shelter and transitional housing resource in the West Valley as well as a number of homeless shelters for those in crisis.

Last year, A New Leaf served nearly 21,943 individuals with resources, from immediate shelter, transitional housing, basic needs, job assistance, counseling and after school programs. Victims of domestic violence are able to start a new life due to the care and support of A New Leaf's staff and volunteers. Founded in 1971, A New Leaf is dedicated to making lives better and fighting against domestic violence and homelessness in our state.

For more information about A New Leaf programs including tours and how you can help, please contact 480-464-4648 or visit us at www.TurnaNewLeaf.org.