

United Way of Cass-Clay Bold Goal: Reduce Hunger & Homelessness



FOCUS: HOUSING FIRST



Just last year, I was arrested for panhandling because I was homeless and standing on the corner in Fargo with a sign. I had nowhere to go, no food, vehicle, driver's license. I had recently lost custody of my son, too, who was just a few months old. I didn't have anything. I'd pretty much given up and didn't have a lot of hope.

Then I met Ashley. She is what is called a "Housing Navigator" here in our community. It is something new that United Way was able to help start with a bunch of other organizations that work to help people who are homeless, like I was. When I met Ashley, I was sleeping outside just about every night or bouncing between the homeless shelters in town, because a lot of times they were full. Most of the time I would sleep under the bridge near Petro downtown. But really, I spent most of my time in and out of detox or the emergency room, or jail. In addition to losing custody of

my son, I also lost my life partner – my son's mom, Sarah. She passed away while serving time in jail. I wasn't in a good place. During that time, every morning I would walk to Labor Masters by 5:30 a.m. to try to get work for the day – a lot of people think that homeless people don't work, but that's not the case.

One thing that people don't think about when they think about homeless people is, where do they put all of their stuff? If you don't have a home, you have to carry everything you own with you, and when you get to a job site or even go to the grocery store people judge you right away and label you – that was really tough for me. But, if you have an apartment at least, there is a place for you to put your stuff, get a good night's sleep and be ready for work in the morning.

Ashley was the one who helped me to think about housing FIRST and getting that home base as a step one, so that I could focus on all of the other things in my life, like getting sober and getting custody of my son. We set goals and figured out how to get there.

She went with me to find an apartment and put together a plan. Step by step she was there with me – I knew I wouldn't be able to rent an apartment because of my background, but she was able to get me into an apartment, and then take steps to work toward getting my license back, saving for and getting a vehicle, and putting things in place so I could be at a point to regain custody of my son.

It all started from having a home – a home base. That was a barrier for me in the past. Having an apartment is what has made the difference for me to actually make progress on my goals, and be able to show that I could provide a good life for my son, which was a battle in the beginning.

Just a few months ago, I got custody of my son back and we're living in that same apartment that Ashley helped me get into. She even helped me by getting some donated things for David like a crib, sheets, and some toys. We're getting into a routine and it was so fun to be able to take him to the park to play this fall and then come home to the apartment. We're on the right track.

- Benjamin, West Fargo



BOLD COMMUNITY GOALS

1 REDUCE HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS

2 PREPARE CHILDREN TO SUCCEED

3 HELP PEOPLE BE INDEPENDENT

4 LIFT PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY