

# Philadelphia Committee to End Homelessness

# HOME

## Ending Homelessness With Homes

# What Will Be Different This Holiday Season?

### Keeping Warm

**T**here are hundreds of homeless families in Philadelphia who won't have much to celebrate this holiday season. I'd like to tell you about one who will.

Alisha Jackson will cook her first holiday dinner in her new two-bedroom apartment in West Philadelphia. She'll string white lights around the windows, she'll scour the internet for tips on cooking candied yams, and, at the request of her daughters, who are two and three, she'll serve banana pudding for dessert.

"Last year we didn't celebrate the holidays," she said. "We couldn't cook because we didn't have a stove or a sink."

Alisha and her family were what is often referred to as the invisible homeless, those who endure abysmal, often harmful, living conditions because they feel they're safer and more humane than shelters.

They were living with Alisha's grandmother in a tiny apartment on a drug-infested street. The walls were cracked and the wind rushed in, making the heat that trickled through the radiators useless. In the winter, when Alisha gave her daughters a bath, their lips turned blue and their hair froze.

"It was hard," she said, "because I want to be the best mom I can be."



Alisha's nineteen. She's the sole source of financial and emotional support for her daughters. Her grandmother, who raised her, is sick.



## An Education

In an attempt to create a better life for her family, Alisha enrolled in community college. She hoped to become an elementary school teacher, but she felt guilty spending money on transportation, and she often missed class to take her grandmother to her doctor's appointments.

After a year of juggling school and motherhood while trying to keep her family afloat on almost no income, Alisha realized that the long-term nature of an education was a luxury she couldn't afford. She became a Certified Nurse's Assistant (CNA) and took a job in a nursing home. It paid \$9.00 an hour, and there was little room for advancement without a nursing degree.

When Alisha left school, she gave up her dream of creating a home for her daughters. She had a little money saved, but she couldn't scrape

together enough to cover the upfront costs of moving, roughly \$1800. She focused on getting through each day, waking up at 5:30 a.m. so she could start her long commute to work, rushing past abandoned buildings in the dark to buy a dinner she couldn't cook from a grocery store that had been held up six times in a year, wrapping her daughters up in their coats at night, warming their hands as they fell asleep.

She had no idea that a small non-profit, a group of 111 philanthropists and a major children's hospital were working together to change her life.

## A Network of Support

Alisha enrolled her daughters in the Early Head Start (EHS) program at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Beverly, her case manager, visited Alisha in her home twice a week, offering parenting support and helping her to become her children's first teacher. When Beverly saw the conditions in which Alisha and her children were living, she immediately called us at The Philadelphia Committee to End Homelessness (PCEH).

At PCEH, we've been offering support to the men and women living on the streets through our Day Center and Outreach Services since 1982. In 2005, we created SafeHome Philadelphia, a Housing First initiative focused on helping homeless and at-risk families create stable homes. Since then, we've helped over 100

families, kept over 200 children out of shelter and achieved 85% stability rates.

We've recently partnered with the Early Head Start program at Children's Hospital because we know that safe housing is crucial to healthy development, and we want to ensure that parents who are seeking support for their children have the stable foundation they need.

We're privately funded, so we depend heavily on foundations and the generosity of individuals. Last spring, we applied for a grant from Impact100, a group of 111 female philanthropists who pool their funds to make one high-impact grant to a small Philadelphia nonprofit.

The competition was fierce, but they chose us out of 123 applicants, and because they did, we are able to offer 25 families, including Alisha's, safe and stable homes. Our program is unique because we partner with families, helping them to find safe, affordable, private-market housing, providing two of the three months' upfront rent, offering linkages to community-based social services, and visiting them in their homes once every two weeks, helping them to become stable tenants.

Alisha and her daughters have been in their new home for four months. Alisha's grandmother has moved to an assisted living facility, where she'll receive the care she needs. The family visits often, and the girls draw her pictures of their bedrooms. Thanks

to donations and lots of luck at yard sales, we've been able to provide the family with beds, dressers, a sofa, and the dining room table on which they'll eat their holiday dinner. Alisha has bought curtains, dishes and candles that smell like cinnamon. She lights them every afternoon.

Alisha works hard, and money is often tight, but for the first time in her life, she's excited for the holidays. She's also a little bit nervous. She's invited her grandmother over for dinner, and she wants everything to be perfect.

Please join us in building a network of support for the men, women and families in Philadelphia who are desperately trying to create stable homes, promising futures and memorable holidays. It only takes a minute to fill out the enclosed envelope or to visit us online at [www.pceh.org](http://www.pceh.org). If we all work together, the smallest donation can make a world of difference.



# What Will Be Different?

*'This year, we have our own home. We're not sharing a house with anyone. We can celebrate the holidays the way we want to, and most importantly my children are much happier.'* **Ebony**

*'This year I can have the holiday I want. I feel safe and secure. Last year, I was too scared to stay in my house.'* **Sharonda**



*'This year, I have a job and I'm looking for a place to live.'* **Mitchell**



*'This year I have a place where somebody actually cares, which has allowed me to regain faith in myself. My spirits are very high.'* **Daniel**

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## PCEH

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