

PARTICIPANT PROFILE:

Housing Choice Voucher Young Adult Program targets young adults who are aging out of foster care or homeless



Collaborative community efforts prevented a young mother who experienced foster care from having to place her own child into the system she came from. Pictured above are Rashida Womack and her son, Ryan.



HADC Works to Prevent, Address, and End Homelessness for Youth Adults in DeKalb

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At some point in our lives, there comes an event that will test us all. An event that forces you to answer fundamental questions - Who am I? Where do I want to be? What am I made of? Twenty-three year old Rashida Womack was forced to answer all of these questions as a series of events almost broke her, until assistance from HADC and the DeKalb County Continuum of Care partners enabled her to gain the stability she had desired for so long.

Rashida was placed in the Foster Care system at the age of 15, having her family and her home snatched from right under her feet. This was especially traumatizing due to the fact that she knew the majority of her family members, yet no one came to save her from her lonely existence in the system. She spiraled into a deep depression that made it difficult for her to look toward the future. At the age of 18, Rashida aged out of Foster care. She had her son, Ryan, at 22.

Things were looking up until she lost her job followed by her home

shortly after, forcing Rashida and her infant son to live in her car. Rashida explained, "I was already dealing with depression from growing up in the system, so this just made me stop wanting to motivate myself to do better and be happier as a person."

The depression got so bad that Rashida even contemplated giving her son to the Division of Family and Children Services (DFACS), "I didn't want to be a mom anymore. I couldn't find myself trying to be happy enough to be around my son and spread that energy to

him." Things were looking bleak until United Methodist Children's Home referred Rashida to the Housing Authority of DeKalb County (HADC) for a voucher as part of a recent initiative to provide rental assistance for young adults who have aged out of foster care or who are homeless. This would allow her to get off the streets, into an apartment, and avoid subjecting her son to the same loneliness that she felt growing up in the system.

Rashida located an apartment, however she could not move in because the unit was not ready to be inspected. Once again, the young mother was left asking herself how she was going to take care of herself and her baby, "I didn't even have a set schedule to feed my son, I didn't have a set schedule to get my hair done, put makeup on - why, where, in the car?."

With very few options left, Rashida decided to reach back out to United Methodist Children's Home to help her in her time of need. Through DeKalb County's Continuum of Care partners, she was referred to resources they knew she could benefit from. New Life Ministries paid for her to stay in a hotel for one week as she was waiting for her apartment to be inspected. First Step Staffing provided immediate temporary employment so Rashida could start earning money and truly begin her journey to independence. Our



In June 2015, HADC committed to providing up to 100 vouchers for a Young Adult Program targeting youth aging out of foster care and homeless youth (aged 18-26).

As of December 2016, HADC has issued 34 vouchers to young adults and is currently housing 15 young adults, with 19 more currently searching for housing. Approximately one-third of the households have children, and the average annual household income of participants in the program is \$11,000.

House offered child care and a rich learning environment for her young son while she worked as well as a family advocate who provided counseling for Rashida. DeKalb County Board of Health's MORE Program (*Mothers Offering Resources and Education*) provided Rashida with a crib and clothing for her son as well as education and counseling for herself.

With the support she receives from HADC's Housing Choice Voucher Program, Rashida and her son live in a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment. Her new home has given her a newfound sense of happiness and stability in which she can now build upon. She's been hired back full time at her previous job. She is beginning to thrive again and plans on attending college in the near future.

Rashida is very thankful for everything the Continuum of Care partners have done for her and her son. She explained that throughout

the entire process, she was determined to exert the same amount of effort that others put into her success, "I couldn't just leave it all in their hands to just carry me as an adult, so I think it made it easier for them to help me once they saw how determined I was."

Rashida plans on working with some of the same programs that helped her in the past by speaking to troubled youth in the Foster Care system. She's confident that sharing her experiences will motivate those who have lost hope. and a rich learning environment for her young son while she works.

HADC's Young Adult Housing Choice Voucher Program is another way HADC works to achieve its mission "to provide sustainable and affordable housing as a platform to enhance lives" and to build a better future for young adults in DeKalb County.