




Through the eyes of a child



Changing the lives of the next generation

Through Rianna's Eyes



Day after day, Rianna's mother saw HEARTH's sign on Perrysville Avenue, with the picture of the house with the front door handle in the shape of a heart with the tag line, "Opening Doors for Families in Crisis." Finally, she decided to call, to see what exactly HEARTH did to help families because she was in the middle of a housing crisis. Shortly after, Rianna, age nine, moved into Benedictine Place with her mother and brother. Now as a 16 year old, Rianna has reflected on her time before HEARTH and has realized how difficult life was for her family.

"I don't know exactly when things started going downhill. I just remember that we were struggling with money to the point where it worried my brother and me. We just wanted to keep our apartment and be able to live with our mom. During the midst of all the hardships, my brother and I had to stay at my dad's for about a month. It killed the both of us to see her have nowhere to go. We could stay at our dad's in the winter, where there was heat and hot water, but we wanted things to be different so we could all be together as a family."

"It was hard for me and my brother in the sense that not everyone knew what we were going through. Most kids were worried about getting the newest iPod or the newest cell phone. We were only concerned with how much money we would have to buy groceries, or if we'd have to sleep in the same bed to keep warm at night."

The weight of not having food or hot water and being cold at night was taken off their shoulders once they walked through the doors of Benedictine Place. They were provided with a furnished apartment complete with bedding, towels, and a fully stocked kitchen. Along with 14 other families, they had supportive services available to them through their difficult time. "My brother and I realized we were not alone. Other families were struggling with the same thing. It helped me feel a little more accepted. If I ever needed to talk to anyone, there were people who understood what we were going through."

"We had to grow up a lot in order to deal with the hardships. There are weeks where we struggle a little. No one's life is perfect. Nothing is as bad as it was before HEARTH, and I don't think it ever will be again."

Now, at 16, she is a Child Care Volunteer for the agency on Monday nights when the mothers have their Life Skills meetings. She credits HEARTH with much of the stability she and her family are now experiencing. "The reason I

volunteer at HEARTH is because I want to give back to them as much as they have given back to me and my family. HEARTH helped me grow to become a better person. I learned I need to go to college, get a good job and provide for my family."

Rianna is not sure what would have become of her family without HEARTH but knows one thing for sure, "My mom got back on her feet. I am very proud of my mom, very, very, very proud. I look back at how little I was when I was at HEARTH and see how much I've blossomed, it's amazing how much they contributed to that."

Rianna's story is just one of 361 children, whose lives have been positively impacted by HEARTH. Their stories are just as important as their mothers' are. They are the next generation with endless possibilities after seeing their mothers overcome so much adversity. With the help of HEARTH, new doors are opening to a brighter future.



What Describes the Families at Benedictine Place?

Homeless women with children

Families from all of Allegheny County and the city of Pittsburgh

An average range of 24-45 years of age

50% of the women are victims of domestic violence

30%-60% of the women have mental health issues

10%-30% of the women are recovering from substance abuse

Families have 1-4 children, ages range from birth to 18

14 out of 15 families do not receive child support; 95% are in poverty

Help us brighten the future of more children, who will come to the doors of Benedictine Place with their mothers by including HEARTH in your annual giving this year.

To donate to HEARTH now, please use the Donate button on the left.

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