



MUTUAL HOUSING

CALIFORNIA

SHAPING PLACES • SHAPING LIVES

Three years ago, when Yolanda Foster got the call that there was an opening for a two-bedroom apartment at Mutual Housing on the Greenway, she was still suffering the after-effects of a stroke. She was sleeping in a van, with her kids living in a friend's house. Her self-esteem had hit an all-time low. She needed sedatives and anti-depressants to get through the day.

"I thought I had lost everything," Yolanda recalled. "I thought everything was gone. I was depressed, drinking a lot. I felt inadequate - I couldn't protect my kids. I felt like less than a mother, really low - lower than dirt."

In a fantasy world, this would be the place in the story where Yolanda Foster turns her life around and where her kids go on to get their Ph.Ds and find the cure for cancer and everybody gets rich and they figure out how to make peace in the Middle East.

The reality, however, is that three years after she moved into the Greenway community, Yolanda Foster is only now beginning to really find her way.

It's taken her almost that long to come to trust the people who help her the most - the other women in her circumstances who live in the Greenway, the ones who sit at the picnic tables near the front of the community, to watch the comings and goings, to support each other, to make the place feel safe, to instill a sense of power to each other and to everybody inside the gate so that they might be able to affect what goes on outside it, too.

Yolanda could still use a couch for her living room, and sometimes it's a struggle for a single mother of four who relies on public assistance to come up with the money for household necessities as basic as toothpaste.

But one thing is sure and stable for Yolanda and the three children who still live under her roof and that is that they have that roof.

"That is the major thing for me," Yolanda said. "I feel as long as I have a roof over my head, I can go to the food bank or somewhere and make something happen. If I don't have that housing, I'm stuck. Now, I have my family, and we don't have to worry about being cold."

More than just a roof, Yolanda Foster found a community when she moved into Mutual Housing on the Greenway in south Sacramento and its gathering of strong-willed female resident leaders, committed organizers and able managers. Yolanda said that living in the Greenway - one of 20 communities created and managed by Mutual Housing California, one of the Sacramento region's most prominent nonprofit affordable housing developers - is the first time in her life that she has ever experienced anything like this sense of community.

Yolanda

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