

## **NALDA'S NEXT MOVE**

Nalda (her name has been changed to protect her privacy) has a sparkling personality and is extremely optimistic. She is determined to provide ample opportunities for education and success for her four children. Her family has lived at People's Emergency Center (PEC) for nine years.

Born and raised in Puerto Rico, she moved to Philadelphia with her husband and three children when she was 19. Their fourth child was born in Philadelphia. After she and her husband separated, meeting basic needs for her family was very difficult. She had no family to help her in Philadelphia. Nalda had a ninth-grade education and spoke very little English. Lack of housing stability meant that she was in danger of losing custody of her children. Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services referred them to PEC in 2011 so that they could stay together.

"When you don't know where to go and you have children it's very stressful and you feel very alone," Nalda said.

When she arrived at PEC she was scared, overwhelmed, and literally in tears. She thought that shelters were unsafe. PEC staff were caring, and fair. Nalda began to feel more comfortable. In about a week she realized she had made the best decision for her family.

With housing stabilized, food and clothing for her children, and the older children enrolled in school, Nalda dedicated her time and energy to participating in every program in PEC's holistic array of services. She was an active participant in case management. Parenting education on child development and an assessment for learning delays revealed a speech delay for her 11-month-old. Her case manager connected Nalda to resources for speech therapy with a bilingual therapist who would come on-site to work with her and the baby. She learned English and obtained her GED.

Within eight months Nalda was ready to move to permanent supportive housing, the next opportunity for her family. The children were excited to have their own rooms. PEC helped them get beds and cabinets. Nalda was able to focus on her education and career planning so that one day she could be independent and care for her family on her own. Nalda found part-time work as a home health aide and sought her associate degree in Applied Science. PEC's computer classes helped her to manage her college workload. After Nalda received her degree, she secured a full-time job in phlebotomy. She also earned certificates in phlebotomy, medical assistance, and CPR/AED.

"They helped me, but I had to do my part to grow", she says. "If you don't help yourself how can anyone else help you? PEC staff would build you a bridge – you had to choose to go across or go back."

Now, nine years after coming to PEC's shelter, Nalda wants more stability for her children. Although she has been successful in permanent supportive housing she is driven to get to the next level, both in housing and career. She told her case manager that her new goals are to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing and buy her first home. Nalda wants to have property to leave to her children – a place that they can always call home. PEC has several options to help someone prepare to purchase their first home – financial management workshops, financial counseling, and the Home Ownership and Maintenance

Initiative – and she completed all three programs. Then we connected Nalda with another provider for housing counseling.

Her children share her positive outlook and enthusiasm for their futures. Her oldest (16) son is wrestling at regional and state levels, runs track and plays football. He plans to get a sports scholarship to help pay for college. Her second son wants to be an actor. He performed in three school shows – even the lead role of Simba in Lion King. He is In line for a scholarship to art school. Her daughter also likes dancing and was in Lion King. Nalda’s youngest is 10 and loves to draw. He wants to go to MIT to study science and become an inventor.

Now she is confident and ready for the next step. Nalda will complete the housing counseling program this summer and start the homebuying process.

“The most important thing that I gained at PEC was a bridge to my dreams. PEC helped me find the right path – continuing my education – and I will be able to walk across to them.”