

Help from HopeSource provides relief for Ellensburg resident



Photos: Brian Myrick

Raven Birdsong sits with her daughter, Joslyn, in their Ellensburg apartment, Wednesday, May 9, 2012. Birdsong was able to fund housing with help from HopeSource. (Brian Myrick / Daily Record)

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By JUSTIN PITTMAN staff writer

Editor's note: Part of a continuing series.

Raven Birdsong arrived at the lowest point of her life two years ago. She had to move out of an apartment she lived in due to a situation with her roommate.

Her plans to move to the Tri-Cities area with her newborn baby's father fell through after the couple split up. She was kicked out of her mother's house and spent a night crying in jail following a fight between the two.

She was broke. She had no job, no car, no cell phone and no place for her and her daughter to live. She and her daughter stayed with Birdsong's aunt temporarily, but eventually had to move out of that residence as well.

"It was horrible," Birdsong, 22, said. "I didn't know what to do."

Birdsong's situation at that time contrasts starkly with her living conditions today.

"I can sit down and relax in my own home," said Birdsong as she sat in the comfortably furnished living room of a two-bedroom apartment in Crestview Terrace. She has an Internet

connection at home, a car and a job at Spurs Bar and Grill that has given her opportunities to advance. She is a student at Yakima Valley Community College.

Reaching this point has taken determination, and support from several local agencies.

Back on track

A state agency referred Birdsong to a counselor who, in turn, referred her Ellensburg's HopeSource. By the time Birdsong contacted the organization, all of her belongings were either stuffed in her car or temporarily stored at her aunt's house, and she was about to be living on the streets, she said.

"I basically had no one but my aunt and a few of my friends," Birdsong said.

HopeSource gave Birdsong a place to stay in its three-unit emergency housing complex a few days after she filled out an application. She described the feeling of having a place to live as fantastic.

"I was so happy that was the perfect thing I needed to help," Birdsong said. "Pretty much being homeless and being told you have somewhere rent free, it was awesome. It was the best feeling in the world. ... It gave me hope to get everything together that I needed at that time."

Birdsong said HopeSource provided mentoring as well as referrals to other support programs, vouchers to buy clothes and a card redeemable for food at a local food bank.

HopeSource limits clients' stays in their emergency housing complex to 90 days, and Birdsong faced challenges as she began looking for more permanent housing.

When Birdsong first started looking, she thought she would have to move in with somebody who had an extra bedroom, and options were scarce. She could only afford \$300 per month in rent.

"There really, honestly was nothing out there," Birdsong said.

Housing

But she kept making calls. Eventually, Birdsong was accepted into HopeSource's Nova program, which paid her rent in a studio apartment for a year while she waited on a list for low-income housing at Crestview.

HopeSource's WorkSource program helped Birdsong obtain a job at Spurs while she lived in the studio apartment. She now works 25 to 30 hours each week, and has been able to drop the state assistance she was receiving before being hired.

Birdsong began attending classes at YVCC while still living in emergency housing, and said she is especially proud of her ongoing education. Birdsong is the first person in her immediate family to attend college.

“I never thought I’d be able to go to school, but I did it,” Birdsong said. “I feel like that in and of itself keeps me going every day.”



Determination

In addition to the help provided by HopeSource and other organizations, Birdsong said her determined spirit gave her confidence that she would land on her feet.

“I’m just like that. I’ve been like that since I was a little tiny girl,” Birdsong said. “When I set goals, I get them done. I just always feel like no matter what, there’s something to be accomplished.”

Birdsong described HopeSource’s emergency housing and the Nova programs as difficult to get into due to demand for the services. She now sometimes watches friends, unable to get similar assistance, struggle with housing problems and other issues similar to the ones she faced.

“I’ve talked to so many friends of mine who need help with that kind of stuff, and can’t do it through HopeSource,” Birdsong said.

She has, at times, let friends stay with her temporarily.

“No one wants to be that low, and people need help sometimes,” Birdsong said.

Birdsong says the help given to her at her low point showed some people do genuinely care about others.

“It’s been awesome,” Birdsong said. “It’s all helped me get ahead, and with HopeSource, they did nothing but help me 100 percent.”

In a thank you letter sent to HopeSource, Birdsong said she’s now happier than she has ever been before.