

“Taking My Life Back”

Sharmonic talks in her own words about how, with your support, she was able to find home, employment, and independence.

My name is Sharmonic. Until recently, I spent two years on the streets of Washington, DC, struggling with clinical depression and chronic pain from a car accident I was in several years ago. Before experiencing homelessness, I had always held down a job (usually more than one!), working mostly in clothing and department stores.

Department store jobs don't necessarily sound like the most physically demanding of jobs, but there were still boxes to unload from trucks and large amounts of items that needed to be restocked. I would start my day feeling pretty good, but by the end of the day I would be in so much pain that it was hard for me to move, much less do some of the tasks I was assigned. Eventually, I was let go from my job and I fell deeper into the depression I was barely managing at the time. Unable to immediately find a new job and with no income, I could no longer afford my small apartment. I bounced between friends' places until the burden on them became too great and eventually they were no longer able to help. For the first time in my life, I had nowhere to go. I was homeless.

Searching for work while I was on the streets was almost impossible for me. I could rarely follow up on jobs that I was able to apply for at the library and I didn't have any place to store necessary items like interview clothing. Living on the street also increased my depression symptoms and made my physical disabilities worse. I started to feel hopeless; as though there was no point in trying to get a job. It felt like no one would be willing to take a chance on me. So, why even bother?

Then, about a year ago, I was approached by a homeless outreach worker, and they started talking to me about getting housing. With their help, and a little bit of hard work, I was able to secure a housing voucher and, finally, start living in my own apartment. Soon after I was housed again, I was connected to Colin on the

Pathways to Housing DC Supported Employment team who immediately got to work helping me find a job. After years on the street, living in darkness and uncertainty, I was starting to feel hope return to me. It felt like things were finally falling into place.

After just a few weeks of working with Colin, I received a call, saying that a business wanted to bring me in for an interview. I was excited, but also nervous and anxious. I didn't have confidence that this could happen



for me. It felt like the gap between this opportunity and my last job was growing too large for anyone to be willing to take a chance on me. Colin reminded me that, because they were inviting me to interview, they had already taken that chance

on me. An important part of what Pathways' supported employment services have done for me is to help me regain my belief in myself and my own skills and value.

I still remember the way it felt when I went in for my first day at work there. When I first got my housing, it started to feel like everything was falling into place for me. When I got that job, it felt like I was starting to take my life back. After struggling for two years with homelessness and worrying about where my next meal would come from, having a job was wonderful—not just to help me pay the bills and support myself, but also to give me back my independence and enable me to make choices again. And most of all, it restored my sense of self worth.



Christy Respress, MSW
Executive Director

“What’s Next? Hope.”

Christy’s Corner

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

Desmond Tutu

Through your support, Pathways to Housing DC has **ended chronic homelessness for over 750 people** in the District. But we don’t just provide people with an apartment. We also customize each person’s support services based on their needs and desires. Those services include mental health treatment, addictions treatment, physical health care, case management, and therapy. Teams of clinicians, nurses, social workers, and psychiatrists work with each individual to self-determine their own paths to reclaiming their lives. **Once a person has moved into housing, we ask, “What’s next?”** Recovery looks different for each person. It could be re-connection with family and friends, seeking

help with addiction and/or mental health, or finding self-expression through artistic or creative skills. For many, employment and/or education are the most important answers.

I thank Sharmonic for sharing her story in this issue of the Pathways Post. She is one of the hundreds of people that Pathways to Housing DC serves who see employment as a path to independence and a representation of recovery from their experience of homelessness. For Sharmonic, **the dignity and independence that work provided for her was the key to rebuilding her sense of self-worth and hope that her life could and would get better.** One of the goals in our current Strategic Plan is to expand our employment services so that we can offer them to every person in our programs who is interested. **At this time we have a waiting list for our Supported Employment program** and must often refer people to other community organizations, even though most people would prefer the continuity of having all of their services in one location. I look forward to updating you on our efforts and progress to expand these vital services!

Pathways Happenings



Thank you to **Washington Nationals** for so generously donating tickets to a game!

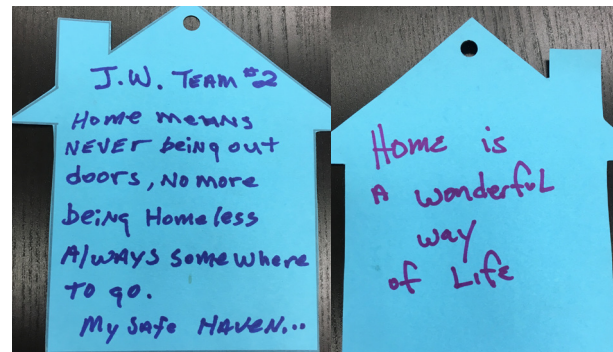
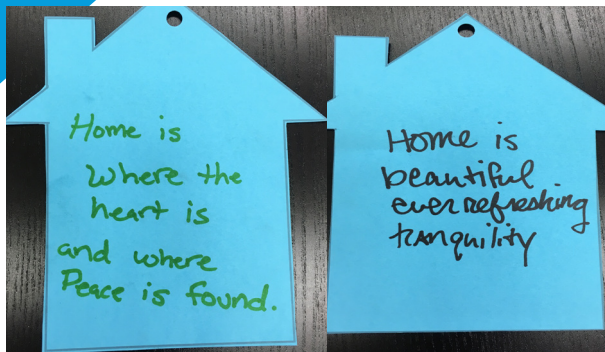


Have we mentioned we love our volunteers? **18 Oracle employees** chose to spend an afternoon after work helping to spruce up some of our tenants’ homes!

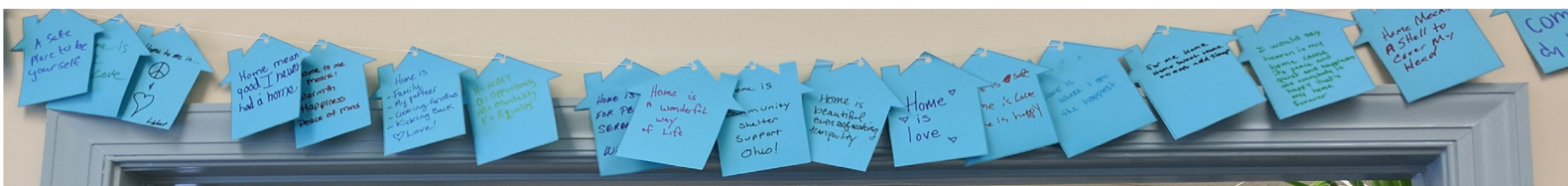


University of Denver Chapter of the Roosevelt Institute visited to learn about Housing First policy to bring back to their home state.

On August 9th, Pathways DC staff, friends, and community members celebrated the educational and employment accomplishments of 23 Pathways DC consumers at our annual **Celebration of Hope!**



We asked over 100 of our consumers:
“What does Home mean to you?” Here are a few of the responses.



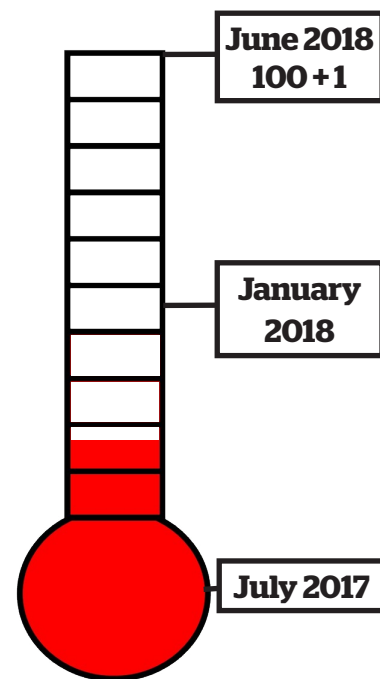
In July, Pathways DC kicked off its 101 Homes campaign to permanently end chronic homelessness for over 100 District residents this year, **more than any single year in Pathways DC's history!** Since July we've already ended homelessness for 18 of our most vulnerable neighbors and are on track to house and support more than 100 people this year. But it takes more than just an apartment to permanently end homelessness and **we cannot accomplish this without you.** Your generosity fills in the gaps that complete each person's journey toward a life filled with meaning and hope

Head to www.pathwaystohousingdc.org/how-you-can-help to find out how you can get involved and help us change over 100 lives this year.

The Road to 101 Homes

Ending homelessness for 101 people this year is no easy task, but with your help we're well on our way!

Our progress so far:



More Than a Job

Staff Spotlight



Colin Fink is an Employment Specialist on our Supported Employment Team. We recently sat down with Colin and asked him a few questions about his work of connecting Pathways consumers with jobs.

What is your favorite aspect of your job?

My favorite aspect of the job is the amount of collaboration it involves. I love working with our mental health and outreach teams to strategize on how best to support our clients. It's exciting meeting with managers and employers to discuss how to give my clients the best chance to exceed their expectations. I enjoy the comradery of the Supported Employment Team as we discuss challenges we've faced and how we've met them. But most importantly, I love collaborating with my clients to help them achieve dreams they had to put on hold or, in some cases, forgot they even had.

What does employment mean to you?

To my clients, employment is a way break free from the feeling of being homeless. It is a chance to take greater control over their lives and assert

greater independence. To me, employment is a story. When you look at someone's employment history and listen to them describe their goals, you not only see their dreams, but the obstacles they've faced pursuing those dreams. As a supported employment specialist, it is my job to support my clients' develop careers that tell the story they want to tell.

What are some challenges you face?

The greatest challenge I face is when a client does not have a cell phone or other means of direct communication. I can work with clients to find ways to overcome just about every other obstacle, from transportation to addressing gaps in their resume. However, when they cannot readily be reached, it becomes like finding a needle in a haystack.

What motivates you in this work?

Pathways offers our clients Home, Health, and Hope. As a member of the Hope department, the desire to kindle that Hope motivates me. Every time I meet with a client and learn about another goal they want to reach, I see them fanning that flame and it inspires me. I know what it is to find your calling in life and I want to help the people I work with to find theirs.

Our Greatest Needs

- Large Men's Shirts: L, XL, XXL
- Large Men's Shoes: 10,11,12,13,14
- Men's Pants, Waist Size: 34,36,38,40
- Men's and Women's Underwear
- Pots and Pans
- Cleaning Supplies: Lysol Wipes, Sponges, All Purpose Cleaners
- Comforters, Sheets, and Pillows

Visit www.pathwaystohousingdc.org/our-wish-list for a full list of our needs, including our Amazon Wish List (Amazon ships directly to us!)

Summer 2017 Newsletter

What's Inside:

- Cover Story: *"Taking my Life Back."*
- Christy's Corner: *What's Next? Hope.*
- *101 Homes - Biggest Year Ever for Pathways DC*
- Staff Spotlight - *More than a Job*
- Pathways Happenings

Pathways DC By the Numbers

Stats for May, June, July 2017

28 people placed into housing



26 volunteers donating their time and talents



335 visits to Pathways DC's onsite healthcare clinic



370 individuals served by street outreach teams



225 served by Urgent Care Clinic in DC Superior Court

