



Housing Advocates Help Families Stay in their Homes

The full and staggering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are becoming known, and housing ranks as top challenge for families in United Way Community Schools which support students' basic needs in 31 of the region's schools. In fact, the percent of unstable youth has more than doubled among the 19,000 students served in Community Schools.

In partnership with local school districts and housing service providers, United Way launched innovative housing solutions that improve housing security and decrease the rate of student mobility for families like Diana's.

A single mom of four living on the southside of Bethlehem, Diana experienced extreme health issues preventing her from work during the pandemic causing her to fall one year behind on her rent. Afraid of losing the place her family called home for over 10 years caused Diana reached out to her Community School for help.

"It's hard being a single mom in the hospital worrying about what will happen to my kids," Diana shared.

Diana connected with Bria Dews, a Housing Advocate through New Bethany Ministries' Housing Navigator program. With funding from United Way, Bria helps connect Bethlehem Area School District families in Broughal Middle School as well as Donegan and Fountain Hill Elementary Schools with housing services and other benefits.

In the program's first year, about 40 families experiencing financial insecurities received housing assistance. With Bria's persistence, Diana received the funding to resolve her rental arrears, and her children are able to stay in their home and their schools uninterrupted.

"She doesn't know the impact she has. I was desperate. I wouldn't sleep. Bria didn't quit and because of her, we're still at home," shared Diana.

"My hope is that this role expands throughout the school districts and beyond to meet parents where they are throughout the community. We want families to feel that they are ingrained and a part of the community. We want them to grow roots here," shared Bria. "It doesn't matter your socioeconomic background, or where you come from or what you look like—you're able to maintain and live a safe and healthy life in the community."

When you support United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley's Community Building Fund, you help fund programs like Housing Navigator so families like Diana's can stay in their homes. Give today.