

FEATURED

Snellville woman finds Pathway HOME from homelessness to ownership

By Curt Yeomans

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Dorothy Jackson, left, is joined by Lawrenceville/Gwinnett Housing Corporation CEO Lejla Slowinski at a ceremony marking Jackson's graduation from the corporation's Pathway HOME program on Tuesday. Jackson was homeless three years ago and the ceremony was held outside the home she bought with the corporation's help in December. (Staff Photo: Curt Yeomans)

Dorothy Jackson had moments of doubt as she started her efforts to fight her way out of homelessness with guidance from the Lawrenceville Housing Corporation in 2014.

She felt that she was limited in what she could do to get out of debt largely because of her level of education.

"It was hard, because I couldn't really see how it could happen based on my education status, I didn't finish school, and just seeing how much it really cost to live," Jackson said. "It just seemed impossible to even own a home."

Jackson did fight her way out of debt and homelessness though, and completed her journey from not having a home to being a homeowner in December.

With the help of the Lawrenceville Housing Corporation (which also goes by the name Gwinnett Housing Corporation), Community Sustainability Enterprises and Brand Bank, through the corporation's Pathway HOME program, she moved into a home of her own in Snellville.

Officials from the corporation and the bank joined Jackson to celebrate the milestone during a ceremony held in the new homeowner's driveway on Tuesday.

Jackson, you see, was the first person to enroll in, and graduate from, the Pathway HOME program, through which she bought her home from the corporation.

"She realized that the income she was making wasn't nearly sustainable enough for her and so she took advantage of all of our programs," Lawrenceville Housing corporation CEO Lejla Slowinski said.

Officials from both the corporation and Brand Bank pointed to Jackson as a role model for other people facing homelessness in Gwinnett to follow.

For her part, Jackson said her situation early on was “insane” because the changes she was making were new to her.

“Anytime you’re doing something new for the first time, it’s always kind of like you want to revert back to your old ways of doing things just so you can feel some type of comfort,” she said. “But I think them kind of showing me, ‘This is what it is,’ and me seeing for myself what it is and making that decision, ‘OK, how do you want to live and how much does it cost to live like that? How much do I need to make?’

“They didn’t come up with a game plan for me. It was kind of like one of those things where they asked me questions about what I wanted and, not even (the corporation) making suggestions, but I was able to figure it out for myself.”

While she was receiving guidance from the housing corporation, Jackson decided to put herself on a strict budget. Money was allocated for rent, food, gas money and a little bit of spending cash, but everything else went into savings.

“My budget was just based on necessities,” she said.

She worked her way out of debt gradually, and housing corporation officials said she also increased her savings by about 75 percent and raised her credit score by nearly 100 points.

The turning point came when Jackson got into a Workforce Investment Opportunity Act program at Gwinnett Technical College in 2014. She pointed to that as when she felt things turning around and began to really believe she could reach her goal of becoming a homeowner.

“That’s when I realized that I’ll be able to do this because I’ll be able to go back to school and make more money to be able to really take care of my children.”

She received an associate’s degree in applied science from Gwinnett Tech in 2016, and she said that allowed her to get a job working in the surgical technology field.

Officials at the housing corporation said Jackson’s income doubled because of her new job.

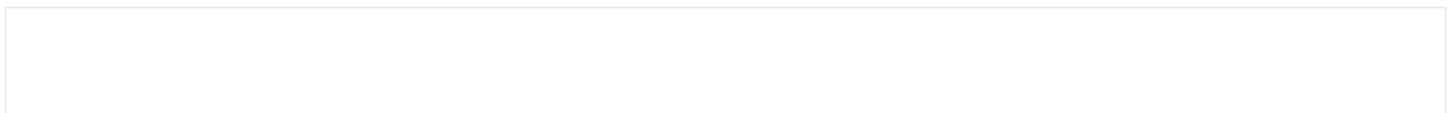
“This is unheard of,” Slowinski said of Jackson’s success. “The second I met her, I knew she was a fighter. She’s a strong person.”

Community Sustainability Enterprises President Deidre Cox said she realized when she met Jackson that she was meeting someone with dreams for a better life.

“Dreams help you set goals, and when you set those goals into motion, that’s when sustainability happens, that’s when you start making things happen,” Cox said before turning her attention to Jackson. “Your smart goals manifested themselves girl, and I’m so proud of you.”

For her part, however, Jackson said she wants her story to send a positive message to other people who are in the same situation that she was in three years ago.

“I think I can pretty much tell them that they can do it, and that it is possible,” she said.





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I'm a Crawford Long baby who grew up in Marietta. I eventually wandered away from home and attended the University of Southern Mississippi, in Hattiesburg, Miss., where I first tried my hand at majoring in film for a couple of years. And then political sc