

Project Hope gives Norwood woman new lease on life

Sam Nickerson, Staff Reporter

August 13, 2015 - A new Norwood resident is overcoming a troubled past and thriving in her new town, thanks to a Boston-area nonprofit.

Eight years ago, after struggling to make ends meet and becoming a victim of domestic violence, Denisha knew she had to make a change for herself and her family.

After the relationship with her daughter's father became violent, Denisha- then working a minimum wage job and doing her best to provide a home for her daughter- uprooted and left her home in Dorchester for another state.

After the domestic violence issues went through the court system, Denisha returned to the Greater Boston area. It was then she was introduced to Project Hope through a friend.

Project Hope, which began in a convent in 1981, helps women from Dorchester and Roxbury who are facing issues such as poverty, homelessness and domestic violence. Project Hope provides emergency housing, affordable childcare, adult education and job training to women in need, and was one of the first family shelters in the City of Boston.

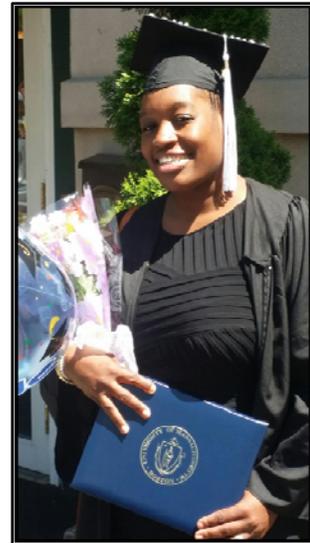
"We're kind of a one stop shop in the community that needs us the most," Project Hope Assistant Director of Development and External Affairs Robyn Eastwood said.

When Denisha returned to Boston, a friend recommended she take a six week program at Project Hope, Community Partners and Healthcare Professions.

"I had done a lot of programs, (but I said) 'whatever, I'm going to do it, we'll see what happens from there,'" Denisha said, "It has been, eight years later, so much more than that. I got through the training program, Project Hope gave me encouragement to do another program where I got an internship, and out of the internship I gained employment that wasn't minimum wage, gained a home not a house, a place to call home."

Project Hope's housing specialist helped Denisha and her two children move to Norwood

"I didn't even know I could leave Dorchester, I thought I had to stay in a complex," Denisha said.



Norwood resident Denisha has benefitted from the work of Roxbury-based Project Hope.

After three years working with Brigham and Women's Hospital and recently receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from UMASS Boston, Denisha now works part-time in Urgent Care for Steward Medical Group, which operates Norwood Hospital.

"I love it. I love the town, the people there are really nice," Denisha said. "My children are in school there, they're doing so well. My daughter, she's a scholar, but my son was having a lot of difficulties in Boston schools, now he's doing amazing."

Denisha's daughter is preparing to enter the Coakley Middle School and her son attends the Callahan Elementary School.

Denisha said her son used to enjoy any reason to avoid going to school in their old neighborhood, but in Norwood, he pleads with her to go to school for even a few hours when he has a doctor's appointment.

"I think that it's more community-based," Denisha said of Norwood Public Schools. "In order for a child to succeed in school, they have to have their home life and school life seeing eye to eye. Being able to see their parents involved in the school system, coming to the school and having a little bit more to say (is important) to gain the child's trust."

Denisha said the family has enjoyed much of what Norwood has to offer during their short time in town so far, including various local events and businesses. So far, Denisha said her children loved the Fourth of July Parade and both go to day camp while Denisha herself has become fond of local restaurants like Conrad's.

Denisha said her son used to play football in Boston, but they do not have the funds to play in Norwood this year.

"He wants to be a Mustang," she said. "All his friends are Mustang football players."

Denisha also enjoys the pace of life outside the city, which allows her family the time to enjoy meal preparation and relaxation, but also school and work. Denisha said she would never let her children out to play in her old neighborhood, but now the children have friends in Norwood who live just around the corner.

"Project Hope gives the strength and encouragement to say, 'okay I went through such a traumatic experience, but there's still hope at the end of everything that people go through,'" Denisha said. "It's the first and only program I've gone through that I'm still in touch with. They're still checking on me. Some people need that...everyone is their own worst critic."

According to Eastwood, 90 percent of the women Project Hope serves are from Dorchester and Roxbury, but they help many others on a case by case basis from all over Greater Boston. And Eastwood said the follow-up is what sets Project Hope apart.

“After they go through the programs and get all the things they need, we’re still there with them,” Eastwood said.

“It’s encouraging to witness all the other women they’re helping. I see these women and I say, ‘that’s me,’” Denisha said.

Denisha said she credits Project Hope with being the biggest influence in the woman she is turning out to be, and can’t thank the organization enough.

“Everybody who knows me knows Project Hope.” She said.

Denisha’s advice to those going through similar struggles?

“As people, we can’t grow on our own, just like plants. They need someone to water them and to feed them. It’s okay if you’re an adult and you still haven’t figured it out yet. So many of us haven’t,” Denisha said. “Take that one baby step. So many more amazing people will come into your life to take those other steps with you.”