

'I'M SAFE'

Housing program is city's 'best-kept secret' for woman, families in need of a safe home

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When Lucera Morales went down, she went down hard.

Think Humpty Dumpty hard, falling off the wall hard.

Domestic abuse is like that. Destructive to the body, and maybe even more destructive to the mind and spirit. But this is a happy ending tale, one in which all the kings' horses and all the kings' men — in this case, played by the Salvation Army and a program called the Ecumenical Partnership for Housing — were able to score a win.

"Before I met the girls' father, I was outgoing, I could stand up for myself," said Morales, 25. "But when he started hitting me, he took all that from me. ... I was broken, scared of the world, scared of everybody.

"But they have this super beautiful program to help. I don't hurt anymore. I'm safe."

Morales' ex had all the tricks. Sure, he knew how to hit, just how and when to yell, but where he really excelled was the psychological games; he had her believing his network of friends was so large, so wide-spread that she wouldn't be able to move, leave him, do anything, really, without him finding out what she was up to and where she had gone.

One night, a few years ago, the cops came and took him away for questioning over an unrelated matter, and that's when Morales made her move. Pregnant with what would be her third child, she scooped up the other two girls and made a break for a domestic abuse center in Oshkosh.



Lucera Morales, 25, and her children, from left, Ana, Lily and Bella. The Ecumenical Partnership for Housing's transitional housing program and support from the Salvation Army have helped Morales restart her life after she became homeless when she left an abusive relationship.

Sure enough, the ex tracked her down. But she made another break, this time coming to Green Bay, this time moving into the Golden House. Only then did she learn that his network wasn't so large after all. She had room to breathe. But she still was broken.

"She wouldn't talk to anyone," said Kim Kennedy, her case worker with the Salvation Army. "She was a good mom, but she'd come in, not say a word to anybody. She kept to herself."

'Green Bay's best-kept secret'

You should see her now. Sitting down with a newspaper reporter she's never met before, in an apartment of her very own, she could chat away about her life's story, her hopes of getting a promotion at her job at AK Pizza Crust, her ambition of going back to school, maybe getting into social work so she can help others like she's been helped. She can talk about how she got a standing ovation from the speech she gave at the Salvation Army annual dinner, how she's actually on speaking terms with her girls' father — yes, the guy who used to beat her still gets to see his girls, so she still has to see him periodically. But, now, he suddenly finds himself dealing with a woman who can stand up to him, who won't take any of his crap.

"She's blossomed into a very strong person," Kennedy said.

The Salvation Army provided her with the kind of counseling the Salvation Army provides: The budget counseling, the rent management lessons, the assertiveness classes, where "you deal with self, healthy boundaries, domestic violence, in a group setting," Kennedy said.

And they hooked her up with the Ecumenical Partnership for Housing, which put her and her girls, Ana, Bella and Lily into an apartment of their own.

That's where EPH comes in, as the bridge between homelessness and independence.

EPH makes transitional homes available to get them out of an emergency shelter and into something with a bit more longevity and stability. And for about the last five years, EPH also has offered what it calls long-term supportive housing, which lasts as long as its clients need.

People who become homeless often have jobs but can't earn enough to pay rent, so EPH puts them into homes and charges them what they can afford, anything from nothing at all to market-level rent.

"Transitional housing is free, but the long-term support addresses the gap, the lack of affordable properties, and people begin paying as they can afford," Pietenpol said. "The average rent in Green Bay is something like \$850 a month, and some of these people just aren't making enough to be able to afford that."



That's basically what Morales has been doing. Her apartment would normally be about \$850 a month, and she started out paying just a portion of that, but she's now up to \$500. If she gets the promotion she's striving for at work, she fully expects her rent to go up. But if something bad happens and she suddenly can't pay, she won't find herself out on the street.

Lucera Morales, a client of the Ecumenical Partnership for Housing and the Salvation Army, and Salvation Army case worker Kim Kennedy.