

"I feel you are put in my path for a reason."



Kim Somaroo-Rodriguez is at the forefront of one of society's greatest challenges - homelessness. "Give people hope," is how she describes her role as the Program Supervisor for Housing/Homelessness at the Department of Children and Families. "I just try to hear them out and offer a little guidance."

It is her calm and engaging ways which impacted DeShawn Jennings as he sought housing for his family consisting of 8 children. So much, that DeShawn took the time to express his sincere gratitude for Kim and her efforts.

"What she did for my family is beyond words. She renewed my faith in people."

In May 2022, DeShawn found himself in a crisis as he and his family were unexpectedly given 24 hours to vacate their home. DeShawn has physical custody of his children who range in age from 15 years to two years of age requiring a four-bedroom living environment. He is a single parent and options, and finances, were limited. "I think I am going to sleep in the car," was his initial thought until he was able to secure funding for a hotel from a relative.

DeShawn then contacted the United Way of Connecticut's 211 Housing Line. Approval was granted for the family to be placed into temporary housing. The family experienced stays at the Best Western, Red Roof Inn, Motel 6, and the Comfort Inn. "I was going everywhere looking for houses," DeShawn explained.



United Way of Connecticut

"I was disheartened by the situation," he stated. "The loss was because my kids could not be stable."

This determined father conducted "research" on his own regarding housing programs across Connecticut. He located the DCF Supportive Housing program which acts to provide families served by DCF with support services and access to quality, affordable and safe housing.



Not only did he find the resource he needed - he also found Kim Somaroo-Rodriguez - Supportive Housing's Program Lead at DCF.

A 23-year Department veteran, Kim engages in a family-centered approach with those she serves. "Find whatever asset the family has because they are in a crisis. Give them some hope," she stated.

One strategy to keep families focused during a time of need is to have them visualize what their new housing may look like including the color schemes in their children's rooms and meals they will be preparing in their own kitchen. She assists them to look at the "big picture" knowing that good things will

come.

She had a specific message to Deshawn. "You kept at it. You are the patriarch of your family," Kim told him.

Kim was initially concerned that DeShawn's family was so large and finding a home to accommodate may prove burdensome in an already overwhelmed system. "He had every door seemingly closed," she

stated. Upon review of the case record, Kim assessed DeShawn as meeting the criteria for Supporting Housing for Families program. She facilitated the housing application process with DCF Worker Samuel Agyei. The wait list was long, but DeShawn was able to be prioritized due to his family's size. But, that still did not mean the process would be quick.

Days and weeks went by which then turned into months as the search for housing continued. "Some days I didn't even want to wake up," DeShawn stated. He always found comfort with Kim. "This is what we are doing," DeShawn was told by Kim. "Any issues give me a call."

"Kim never gave me the runaround." DeShawn remembers so clearly Kim's constant words of encouragement. "This is temporary," she told him. "It's going to get better."

"When she talked, she talked like she understood," DeShawn stated.

Right before Christmas, the journey ended and DeShawn family's located a place to call their own.

"We found a home," DeShawn told Kim.

What is life like now that the family has a permanent place to live? "I coached football while homeless. I coach football now," stated DeShawn. Raising 8 children alone is not easy. "We have to learn the day to day activities and keep the house clean."

The Supporting Housing for Families provided by the Connection continues to assist the family to ensure their housing will remain stable and permanent. Once housing is found, the program and the family work together to make it a "home" even after their CPS case is closed. The program continues to provide ongoing support to Deshawn and his family. The program can make referrals for therapeutic services or assist with summer clothes or camp for the children.

DeShawn will never forget Kim. Just like the family whom Kim helped in 2021 find housing, leading to reunification of their two daughters. "We found a home," that family said as they called and told Kim a couple of years ago. That same family recently sent her pictures of their family around the holidays. Like DeShawn, Kim will forever be a part of their family history.

Kim is humble as she discusses the families she has encountered over the years.

"I feel like you are put in my path for a reason," she stated. For the hundreds of families Kim serves each year, they are forever grateful their paths crossed as well.



