Miracle in NY: Undocumented Domestic Violence Survivor Finds Safe Haven in New Destiny Housing

Consuelo, an immigrant mother and survivor of domestic violence, tells how, thanks to a connection with New Destiny Housing, she was able to leave the shelter and find a safe home for herself and her three children.

Image courtesy of New Destiny Housing

Amid New York City’s struggle to address the unprecedented influx of migrants, one vulnerable group is often left behind: survivors of domestic violence.
This holiday season, the nonprofit New Destiny Housing, emerges as a beacon of hope for migrant survivors who have faced monumental challenges in their search for housing and stability, as is the case with Consuelo Rodriguez.

"We are the only entity in New York City that focuses solely on permanent housing solutions for survivors of domestic violence," said Gabriela Sandoval Requena, New Destiny Housing's Director of Communications and Government Relations, who oversees advocacy and communications for the New York-based organization. "Consuelo is one of the tenants in one of our newest buildings in The Bronx. She was connected through a shelter worker."

Survivors of domestic violence, especially undocumented immigrants, often face overwhelming obstacles to obtaining legal housing and work permits in the United States. Consuelo, a mother, immigrant, and domestic violence survivor, tells how, thanks to a connection with New Destiny Housing, she was able to leave the shelter and find a safe home for herself and her three children.

"On the day I least expected, they gave me the surprise that I had been accepted, and the most amazing thing with them, is that even though my check was too low, they told me it was for two bedrooms, they gave me the blessing of having a three-bedroom apartment. I felt so blessed," said the Cuautla, Mexico native.

After experiencing domestic violence and being forced to live in a city shelter for almost three years because her immigration status prevented her from finding housing, Consuelo was informed that she could apply for housing in one of New Destiny's developments, where she has lived for a year.
After experiencing domestic violence and being forced to live in a city shelter for nearly three years because her immigration status prevented her from finding housing, Consuelo was informed that she could apply for housing in one of New Destiny’s developments, where she has lived for a year. Image courtesy of New Destiny Housing.

Although she has already found housing, she is still waiting for her visa, a necessary step to rebuild her life.

"There are not many resources for associations (...) many people who are waiting for an apartment in the shelter cannot afford to help everyone," explained Consuelo. "Another difficulty I have personally is my immigration status, along with my daughter, we are both undocumented and we are not counted for support, only for my two children who are citizens. The aid was practically only for them and the check is very low and was not suitable for the rent of an apartment". 
Sandoval explained that in Consuelo's case, not having an immigration status that qualified her and her daughter, the financial assistance was only 50 percent for the two minor children born here, which was not enough to cover rent.

"In all of our buildings, tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income in rent. The person pays nothing if they have no income," he clarified.

Founded in 1994, New Destiny Housing works to help survivors rebuild their lives and break the cycle of domestic violence.

"I was in a relationship that was not healthy at all," Consuelo recounted about her experience of domestic violence. "There was physical, psychological and emotional aggression, both for my children and for me. We resisted for a long time because of fear, but also because of the lack of information. Honestly, as a woman, when your identity and dignity are taken away, you are disarmed. We don't have information about this kind of support, that there is a back-up so that we can move forward with our children.

It was only when the father of the children arrived drunk and beat his oldest son, who was 14 years old at the time, that Consuelo decided to ask for help from the neighbors without success. When she returned to defend the minor, the aggressor began to beat her while she shouted at the children to run away from the place and call for help.

"I tried to resist the blows while my children went out one by one, and when I left I told my children: 'excuse me, but I had to call the police'. My children gave me support and told me to go ahead, it was already a lot," she recalled.
Consuelo expressed that it is not easy to get to a shelter, "since you go from one to another until they find one that has a more permanent availability."

"There were nights when we did not sleep because we came from a trauma of living under cameras in the house, we were watched to that degree, and when we arrived at the shelter and found cameras, it was something to start to overcome. We would take refuge in the bathroom to have conversations, and it was like a process. At the shelter they provided us with psychological support because there were many after-effects on my children," she added.

According to Consuelo's account, her ex-partner placed cameras in front of the refrigerator to also control what the children consumed in food.

"We were not allowed, in the case of my children, to be drinking juices or a yogurt, it was like in the time he said they had access to take something from the fridge with his permission. He also watched them when they could watch TV; or if they were playing, he would suddenly talk to us through the cameras. He had us practically under control, even though he was not in the house. He watched us all the time," she recalled.

During their time in shelters, there were times when Consuelo was disconsolate, thinking that they were going to stay there for the rest of their lives, because they could not find an apartment that would be enough to cover their income. Likewise, their immigration status continued to be a problem.

"There is a lot of abuse and I'm sure I'm not the only one. Talking about it with women who were in the same situation, it was the same thing,
Despite the challenges, Consuelo found the light at the end of the tunnel. Now, with safe and stable housing, Consuelo and her children can pursue their educational and professional careers. Image courtesy of New Destiny Housing.

Consuelo's story and the work of New Destiny Housing highlight the importance of providing hope and support during the holidays to those who need it most. This holiday season let's remember the crucial role of organizations like New Destiny Housing and support initiatives that seek to build safe and stable homes for all.

"We feel protected, there is security at the entrance. They give us security so that the aggressor does not have access, or a report is sent. They have also given us support in re-empowering ourselves, in re-starting goals for both my children and me. They have made us feel like we are a family," concluded Consuelo gratefully about the support
received. "We have made the best team, my children and I, and we are making our dreams come true."

At the link newdestinyhousing.org, you can get more information and contribute to this vital cause.