

# Home Sweet Home

The other night my boys and I walked in darkness to our car as we left Noodles and Co. The air was cool and I watched them closely, their little bodies disappearing behind closed doors – all snuggly, warm and bundled in their batman hats, hooded sweatshirts and puffer vests. As I was climbing into the driver's seat, my thoughts turned to the many young people who are not in the same situations as my kids. My eyes filled with tears as I wondered if those young people had found somewhere safe to lay their head.

Earlier that day, I had a conversation with a young man whose face was beaming with the most charismatic smile. This young man first walked through the doors of HOPE 4 Youth a little over five months ago. His family circumstances had drastically changed and he found himself kicked out with nowhere to go. All of a sudden he had the status of "homeless." That first night he was able to stay with a friend. The next day, he came to HOPE 4 Youth.

Most of the youth who walk through our doors for the first time always seem a little apprehensive. This young man was no different. On his first visit, he met with our case managers who referred him to a shelter so that he had somewhere warm to sleep for the night. Before heading to the shelter, he was able to grab clean clothes for the next day and filled his stomach with a hot, nutritious meal at HOPE 4 Youth.

The young man's goal, from day one, was to get his own apartment; he never wanted the status of "homeless," like most of the young people who walk through our doors. He continued to visit the Drop-In Center when the doors opened each day to meet his basic needs – food clothing, personal hygiene products – and work on his employment, education and housing goals. Case Manager, Eddie, worked side-by-side with him on every visit to help move him closer to his goals. All the while, the young man continued to spend his days working and his nights sleeping at the shelter.

Last Monday (Oct. 24, 2016), this young man received the news that his status of "homeless" would soon be in his past. With the help of several people, he was able to secure his very own one-bedroom apartment in Anoka. We know that he was most excited about this news, but his HOPE 4 Youth family were equally excited.

The HOPE 4 Youth family quickly worked to supply him with all the basics that he would need in his new home – kitchen items, towels, a bed and other furniture, etc. Eddie and I brought him to the Donations Center the day that he was moving and showed him everything that he now owned. I was able to share this moment in his life because I wanted a picture to share with everyone who helped this young man; his smile beaming and keys tightly dangling from his hands. I will forever remember his face and the excitement on it; thinking about it brings tears of happiness to my eyes.

The night that he moved, Kim, one of our lead mentors and Lisa, our Executive Director, moved the young man into his new home. They packed up Kim's truck with all his stuff and he hopped into the driver's seat. At that moment, I am sure he felt very different than I had when I climbed into my driver's seat. He was probably thinking about laying his head on his very own bed for the first time in a very long time. Or maybe was thinking about how awesome Kim's truck was. Either way he was happy!

I hope that yesterday the young man woke up, made his cup of coffee that he was looking forward to, and took a moment to reflect on his new status of "housed." He once said, "I think HOPE probably saved my life or else I'd probably be sleeping on the streets still"

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