



## Muhisoni's Story

Muhisoni and her two daughters arrived in Connecticut in 2020 as refugees escaping war and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Through a program funded by United Way's Thriving Families grant, Muhisoni was able to pay for EMT training, which she then leveraged into a job as an aid at a group home for people with intellectual disabilities.

She says that she really enjoys the work as she likes to know that she is helping to take care of people, but her costs are rising. She is in training to get her commercial driver's license so she can move into a higher income job.

**“I am so grateful to United Way for allowing me to get training that helped me find a job to support my family.”**



**“I just want to see my kids every day happy. Now that we have the new apartment, we come home and they are so happy. I feel real good. I feel like okay, I did something, I did this.”**

## **Shontaya’s Story**

Leaking ceilings and a month-to-month lease, Shontaya’s apartment was not in good condition, nor was it secure. As a single mother of six, including twins, Shontaya was looking for better living conditions for her children. When she began to face financial challenges, she was determined to do all she could to ensure that her children have a safe and stable home. Life’s circumstances off-ramped Shontaya from that goal, but she took effective action—she called 2-1-1 for assistance.

Through 2-1-1, United Way’s community navigation resource, Shontaya was provided with temporary housing through a local housing program. Although this option worked for the time being, she was determined to secure a stable home for her family.

She applied to listed apartments one after another, striving for a rental property with a price tag she could keep up with.

After reaching out to housing resources for Greater New Haven residents, she was able to find a stable and suitable home for her family. Shontaya achieved her goal. Now, she feels a joy when she sees her boys come home from school, excited to walk in the door—because they’re walking into their home.

Shontaya attributes her progress to perseverance, prayer, and resource providers like United Way. United Way of Greater New Haven will continue its work to help families uplift and nurture their households for quality living in our community.



# Samantha's Story

Samantha was raised by her adopted mother from the age of 2 years old. After experiencing conflict at home, she found herself homeless at the age of 16. To pursue a better life, she moved from Massachusetts to New Haven into the home of her future mother-in-law. After the move, she eventually learned that this home was not stable and found herself homeless again with 2 children. She was young, scared and unsure of what her future would bring. Samantha heard about United Way's 2-1-1, so she gave it a try and dialed.

Samantha's 2-1-1 agent helped her secure shelter at a New Haven shelter called Columbus House. Adjusting to her new environment had its challenges but Samantha had a sense of hope, and she kept taking action for herself and her boys.

Samantha got connected with a CAN Case Manager through United Way of Greater New Haven who encouraged her enroll her sons in an Early Head Start program. This program was facilitated by Elizabeth Celotto Child Care Center where they provide free child care if the parent wishes to pursue their education.

A bit apprehensive to leave her sons in a new environment at first, Samantha was invited to take a tour of the facility. She was soon after convinced that this was the right place for her children. And with only two more classes left to earn her diploma, Samantha enrolled herself into high school as well.

Through community resources like United Way, Samantha was also able to move out of the shelter and secure a two bedroom apartment her family could call home.

Samantha faced highs and lows throughout her journey at such a young age. She wanted to give up at times, but she didn't let herself, and with the encouragement from her Early Head Start support system, they wouldn't let her give up either. She used community resources that were available to her and was able to turn her life around, for not only herself, but for her boys and their futures.

**"These programs are very important for people like me, and not only for people like me, but also for people in the community as a whole. We need these resources. These programs are a second chance for us to have help, and to know that we're not alone."**



# Kira's Story



Driven by the need for safety after escaping domestic violence in Virginia, Kira and her three children returned to her hometown of New Haven. They moved in with Kira's sister, who has four children of her own. While the kids loved being with their cousins and Kira appreciated the support of being close to family, the living situation soon became overwhelming. With nine people, including young kids, crowded into a small house with one bathroom, the lack of space and privacy quickly took a toll.

Starting over in a new town meant finding work, child care, and housing all at the same time. Through United Way, Kira enrolled her 2-year-old son in quality, affordable child care, and she was able to find work as a CNA, but finding permanent housing remained a challenge.

**"The affordable places were either too small or in unsafe neighborhoods. It felt like I'd never find the right place."**

With the help of United Way, Kira was able to qualify for housing assistance that allowed her to finally find an apartment that provided the privacy and stability her family needed.

United Way also helped her with funds to buy new furniture such as beds for the kids, as many of their belongings were left behind in order to move to safety.

**"When we finally moved in, it was a huge relief. My kids had their own rooms for the first time in months, their grades started to improve, they didn't feel cramped or stressed anymore. They're happy to have a place to call home again."**

With a stable home, Kira could focus on her goals, including returning to school to pursue nursing. She is grateful for the assistance that helped her find affordable child care and a place her kids can call home. Without these resources, she believes she might still be struggling. Now, with her family thriving, Kira feels at peace and is focused on building a brighter future.