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Women with Children Shelter Turns Two

Washington, PA -- "Single mothers are at a great risk," said Leah Dietrich, the Director of Residential Programs at City Mission. "If they don't have access to childcare, that can lead to missing work and losing a job, and without a financial safety net, it can lead to eviction and homelessness."

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, 41% of the homeless population is comprised of families, and 84% of these families are headed by single women – making women with the children the fastest-growing homeless population in the United States.

On August 18, City Mission's Women with Children Shelter celebrates two years of helping to restore homeless families to independence. In the past two years, the shelter, which is currently home to seven families, has served a total of 33 families, including 54 children. Nineteen of those families have moved out of the shelter and into independent housing. Eighteen mothers moved out with employment and 6 of them enrolled in college either during their stay or shortly after leaving the Mission.

Kazmiere came to the Mission in May of last year with her three children. Her addiction had left her homeless, moving with her children from place to place to stay with family members who would take them in.

The moment she stepped in the door at City Mission, her anger, fear, and anxiety simply dissolved away. "The burdens of the world just fell off my shoulders," she explained. "It feels so good not to have to live like that anymore."

In their article, "Resetting Policies to End Family Homelessness," Ellen L. Bassuk, Jacqueline A. Hart, and Effy Donovan claim that, "Family homelessness has emerged as one of the most pressing public health problems in the United States" and that, "The impact of homelessness on children and their families is devastating, and the effects may be lifelong."

Mothers experiencing homelessness often struggle with depression and other mental and physical health problems, which increase the risk of poor physical/mental health and educational outcomes for their children.

"The women and children come here when they are at such a vulnerable and broken state of their life," said Amber Miller, City Mission's Manager for the Women with Children Program. "It's so important for them to know that they are at a safe place and that they are able to get the love and the care that they need. While they're here, they don't have to worry about bills or about the outside stressors in the world. They can just come here and heal and just focus on themselves and their children."

That is exactly what happened for Kazmiere and her family. "I'm not anxious or angry like I was," she said. "I'm just so happy. I let things roll off my shoulders now. They were never a big thing. I just made them that way."

And her children, Nahzari, Jordyn, and Taahira, are also thriving at the Mission. "The girls love it here," Kazmiere said. "I get to spend way more time focusing on them now than I ever could before. Taahira's personality has just blossomed here. Nahzari is able to trust me again. She respects me all the time now. We're seeing each other."

Over the past year, Kazmiere has not only been given the opportunity to invest time with her kids, but she has also been able to work on her own recovery. "My faith is so much stronger," she said. "I always knew God, but I never knew Him like I know Him now. I learned that there is a whole new way to live. I learned how to love again. I learned what integrity means. I've accomplished more in this year than I have in the last 10 years of my life. Seriously."

In the past year, Kazmiere has been able to purchase a car and start nursing school. She is also in the process of looking for her own place and plans to move out of the Mission sometime in September.

Family homelessness can be devastating and have a lifelong impact on mothers and children, but lives are being transformed at City Mission's Women with Children Shelter. Kazmiere and her family are living proof of that.

"Without the Mission providing me the opportunity to keep my kids, this journey would have never started for me. It means everything to me. I'm forever grateful -- for real."

You can help restore the lives of homeless women with children in our community. Learn more about our Women with Children Shelter at www.citymission.org/support/women-with-children or donate to City Mission at <https://www.citymission.org/ways-to-help/donate#donate-money> to help families in need.

About City Mission: For over 75 years, City Mission has sheltered, healed, and restored the homeless to independent living—without discrimination. City Mission's comprehensive program addresses both short-term needs like food and shelter, and long-term needs, including drug and alcohol counseling, mental health and medical treatment, legal aid, and employment training. City Mission's goal is to help each man, woman, mother with children, or veteran who walks through our doors to become a healthy, productive member of society. With your help, we can help our residents renew their lives.