

Good afternoon, my name is **Michele Torland**. My twelve year old daughter, Marae and I live in the Patton Park apartments in Northeast Portland owned and managed by REACH Development.

Back in 2004 I began sharing a home with my parents and both my children Khalia now age 19 and Marae now 12. I overcame domestic violence, attending family counseling, & began to volunteer. I humbly accepted gainful employment in the fast food industry and began overcoming my criminal background. I eventually moved on to work in childcare while attending school at night.

I felt this was as far as my life may go.

Throughout my life, my grandmother had been my greatest supporter. In 2008 she was struck with cancer and passed September of that year. I immediately began caring for my grandfather who struggled with Alzheimer's and Dementia. Over the next eight months his health declined and he was moved to assisted living. My oldest daughter, Khalia, had dropped out of school. I had no income and no idea what I was going to do. I was lost. I had been residing in my grandparent's home and feared returning to my parents to find myself in the same cycle.

I began abusing drugs the summer of 2009 and eventually found myself facing a felony possession charge. Upon my release from jail I was banned from returning home and only had the clothes on my back. I made the choice to begin drug and alcohol treatment and for the first two months struggled with homelessness.

I secured clean and sober living and began receiving unemployment benefits for caring for my grandfather. I was on numerous waiting lists for housing in the Portland area. I had heard of REACH before, but was reminded of them on a visit to Portland Impact. I sought out REACH properties on-line and applied for all the properties waiting lists I was applicable for April 2010.

The treatment facility I was attending began offering Ready to Rent classes, helping prepare renters with obstacles preventing them from being able to rent. I immediately signed up; however, due to the lack of participants the ten week program was going to take much longer to compete. I received a call from Patton Park Apartments notifying me of my name coming up on the wait list. I began the application process in May, but due to my pending felony charge, I was denied. I strongly began advocating for myself and providing references to the rental department. They were informed of my participation in the Ready to Rent program and agreed to let me move-in upon completion. Given the length of time this took, and the availability of a unit. I began to doubt the possibility of this place becoming a reality. Part of why I wanted to live at Patton Park was for the location. I had desired to return to school to earn a degree and PCC Cascade was within walking distance of Patton Park Apartments.

This area spoke to me for many other reasons as well. It holds a personal history for me. Across the street is the Firehouse Cultural Center where in 2006 I had written a small play for the Well Arts Institute, a project in collaboration with Mayor Tom Potter's PDX Vision. Across Interstate Avenue is the Motel where my last relapse had taken place. Directly on the property where

Patton Park Apartments was build is another Motel I stayed prior to my children being born, and where my past criminality had begun. This had to be the place for me I thought. I remember sitting in the park across the street crying for the opportunity to make this place my home. It was August 2010 and I had lost nearly all hope of my daughter being able to start out the new school year with me.

Just as I had entirely dismissed the possibly of moving into a REACH property I received a call from Patton Park Apartments “we have a unit available, it looks like your all approved, are you still interested?”

I was so excited to have Marae see where she would be living we made a visit prior to us moving in This day happened to be the day Peter Blanchard who coordinates many of the youth programs at REACH was assisting families with school supplies. This was among many indicators that I had found my new home, my own home.

September 2010 was huge for my family and me. I registered for PCC while my oldest daughter registered for college across town. All three of us started new schools at the same time.

My youngest daughter has taken advantage of nearly all of the programs made available for youth at REACH. She is a returning participant in Youth\$ave, a savings program helping prepare youth for money management. She attended Rock and Roll camp this summer and performed live. She was involved with the non-profit organization ‘My Story’ who ran a photography workshop for youth and allowed for them the opportunity to meet and see Josh Grobin perform. The Resident Services Coordinator at our site, Erica Tucker has involved Marae in many volunteer opportunities as well as plan fieldtrips, provide tutoring and activities for the youth and adults.

In asking to prepare my story for you today I am grateful to reflect upon this past year. This September marked the first year we have resided in REACH housing and the many advancements that have been made toward my daughters and I’s future would not have been possible if REACH hadn’t have taken a chance on me. REACH has done more than just provide us with a place to live; they have helped me to see the possibilities of a better future for my family and me.

I received my second scholarship this spring and was hired in the Women’s Resource Center at PCC. I will graduate this school year and have plans to transfer to a University. I have participated in financial literacy classes offered by REACH with co-facilitator Julie Wang and am also in an IDA savings program that matches you 3-1.

I love my home and the support living in a REACH property provides. I know I am much more part of my community than I may be living anywhere else. REACH has been instrumental in my road to self-sufficiency and has helped me to reach my greatest accomplishment to date.

Thank you greatly

(comments from Michele Torland, REACH Donor Lunch 2011)

