

Renee

When Renee came to Tabor she was in debt, had 3 small daughters with another on the way and was living in transitional housing. She wanted to clean up her debt and find stable housing.

Renee was assigned to Jen Frank, one of four Shelter to Independent Living (STIL) counselors at Tabor. STIL's mission is to mainstream homeless families and individuals back into permanent housing and the community through housing and budget counseling services – well in sync with the National Alliance to End Homelessness' "Housing First" concept that getting families out of the shelter and into permanent housing as quickly as possible, and then providing intensive services after they are housed rather than through the shelter system, is the key to ending chronic homelessness. In fact, Tabor's is one of six model programs nationwide used by the Alliance to develop a training model to promote Housing First throughout the United States.

Renee met with Jen to develop a plan and budget geared specifically to where she was and where she wanted to go. As Jen explains, "The program is very client driven. Each client has different goals or needs. They may have trouble with housekeeping. They may need to find a job or a car or want to go to college. But our primary concern is to find them housing as soon as possible."

Usually, it takes 1 to 3 months for a client to move from the shelter into their own place. While Renee was slowed down a little, having her fourth daughter, she was in her own place in a little over 3 months.

Landlord advocacy is a large part of what STIL counselors do for their clients. As Jen says, "The rental market is very tight. Landlords are free to rent to anyone. There's no reason for them to take a risk renting to someone with bad credit or poor references." That's where Tabor's program comes into play. Tabor offers protective payee service that assures the landlord the rent will be paid first and all other expenses are paid from what is left. Counselors make home visits and mediate issues between tenants and landlords when necessary. Tabor also offers a lease addendum stating that the tenant leaving Tabor's program can be grounds for eviction. Through various outreach efforts to educate Lancaster area landlords about the STIL program, Tabor has 150 partnering landlords, and the list is growing.

Having found a job and stable housing, and learned to maintain a budget, Renee applied to Tabor's Consumer Credit Counseling Service and hopes to eventually buy a house. Renee knows she'll stay on the right track because knowing that she can take care of her self, "that you don't have to call anyone up to ask for money" is "self-rewarding." She credits Jen and her daughters, ages 9 months to 7 years, with helping her get on the right track. Renee was even able to put aside money to budget a trip to Dutch Wonderland for her girls.

"Tabor is a tool clients can use to get into housing," Jen says. "We are able to create opportunities for them. We can't fix their problems. But if they are willing to work to start a new life, Tabor is there for them."

When asked if she would recommend Tabor to anyone else, Renee exclaims "I already have! A lot of friends are asking me 'How are you doing it?' and I just say 'Tabor, Tabor.'"