



Evelyn's Story

Seven years ago Evelyn and her husband purchased a house with the intention of fixing it up and starting a family. The house was in poor condition with old appliances, plumbing issues, inadequate kitchen, and many other problems, but Evelyn's husband, a very handy man, assured her they would turn it into a dream house. Unexpectedly, Evelyn's husband sustained an injury and passed away only three months after purchasing the house. To fill the hole in her heart, Evelyn became a foster mother for children in need.

Currently Evelyn has five children ranging in ages from two to nine years old. Although she had a lot of love for these children, and provided a place they could call home, she was concerned that her house was not safe for the kids. For example, with no kitchen cabinets the children could easily grab cleaning supplies and utensils, so she was not able to keep basic supplies in her kitchen. After reaching out for help to many places Evelyn applied to Rebuilding Together North Suburban Chicago, and with tears in her eyes she expresses how "they took my ugly house and made my beautiful house."

For two Rebuilding Days in 2010 and 2011, a total of 85 volunteers worked on improving Evelyn's house. In 2010 volunteers gutted and refurbished the kitchen, provided new kitchen appliances and a new washing machine, performed plumbing repairs, cleaned, de-cluttered and organized. In 2011 volunteers provided a new dryer, performed yard work and repairs, built shelves and further organized. Evelyn is extremely grateful with all of the work, especially turning a previously crowded storage area into a library for her kids. "The library touches my heart" she says.

The Rebuilding Together projects have improved not only Evelyn's home, but also the lives of her foster children. Since the first Rebuilding Day Evelyn has noticed the academic benefits that the repair work and library has had on her children. Her children came to her with

a variety of disabilities including physical disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, speech problems, low vocabulary and poor literacy skills. The children old enough to be in school had all C's and D's on their report cards.

Evelyn describes how now the children love to sit down and read in the library for long periods of time, and how there are many things to sustain their attention. When in the library her children often say to her "Mommy, I love this place." Evelyn came from a large family of nine and her mother instilled in her that the most important thing in life was reading; "now," Evelyn says "every time I see a book I buy it." Her library is filled with a variety of books, for every age level and topic including math books, novels, dictionaries, picture books, bibles, Art kits, and books that the children have made.

Although her children are from different ethnic backgrounds she is raising them to be bilingual and literate in both English and Spanish, with the help of the library. They are also learning American Sign Language as a family. Evelyn now looks forward to days when report cards are sent home because the only letters she sees are A's and B's, as her children are now on the Honor Roll.

Not only have the children's reading scores and grades increased but their social skills have dramatically improved as a result of the Rebuilding Together projects. Before the home improvements, if the children spoke at all (many were very quiet due to low verbal and communication skills) they would often use inappropriate language to each other and adults including cursing and violent threats. However, with the addition of the library the children have developed their vocabulary and no longer use "bad language."

The library has created a community of readers often involving all the children, as the older children will read to the younger children and they will create games and puppet shows out of the books. This community does not just include Evelyn's children, but their friends as well. "Before, I did not let anyone enter my house, but since they fixed it I feel a lot better and I

allow my children to have friends over” explains Evelyn. Her children’s friends always tell her how happy they are to come over where they have a quiet place to play and read. Like Evelyn, the children could not be more grateful and often will say “I remember when we were poor” showing how much their perspective has changed.

Evelyn recently was named Foster Parent of the Year by Arden Shore Child & Family Services, her NFP foster care agency. In addition, the Latino Conference of DCFS also has named Evelyn its “Foster Parent of the Year.”

Evelyn is very grateful of the work done by the volunteers and Rebuilding Together. By next year she hopes to open her own day care out of her home, to share her gifts as a caretaker and her “beautiful home” from the Rebuilding Together improvements. With the additional income she gains from the day care she wants to donate to Rebuilding Together. “I want to help other people. I want other people to be happy, like me. That is my plan. I feel it in my heart, so I will do it. Wait for your check.”

Reported by Dana Nixon, Intern serving October-December 2011

