

## Damaris Cardona



**Damaris Cardona is Spanish-speaking. Thank you to Noemi Ozuna, SCAP Community Navigator, who served as interpreter so we that we could share this story in English.**

As a young woman, Damaris Cardona lived in New Jersey. She was married with four children. She thought her life was marvelous until one day her husband introduced her to crack-cocaine. Her happy home was suddenly shattered like a hurricane destroying everything in its path. For a long time, Damaris lived in this drug-addicted nightmare while trying to keep her family together and working two jobs. Over time, it took a toll on

her physical and mental health and her marriage. Then, her husband began threatening her.

Feeling like she had nowhere to turn, but too scared to stay, Damaris fled to her mother's house in Puerto Rico. She ended up living there with her grandparents. She had escaped her life in New Jersey, but her drug addiction caught up with her and things got much worse for Damaris. "I was not in the right state of mind," said Damaris. Family court removed her children from her care and Damaris became homeless.

Depressed over the loss of her children, Damaris' drug use became worse. She lived in an abandoned crack house until one day she had a complete mental breakdown and was hospitalized. After that, Damaris was in and out of several different rehab programs, but what she felt she needed was to be back at home with her grandparents. The courts agreed to this and Damaris returned to the love and support of her family.

Damaris realized she had an opportunity to build a new life and was determined to succeed. She discovered she was skilled at using her hands to make things such as sandals, hair ornaments, and baby clothes. She was able to make a modest living selling her crafts. She happily spent her time working at her crafts and rebuilding her family relationships. She had resolved to make things right.

Damaris met a man and fell in love. He had a drug problem, but unlike Damaris, he wasn't in recovery. In spite of his drug use and the problems it created, they lived together for eight years. His recovery began after he spent time in jail where he received detox and treatment. They were married on Damaris' birthday, October 19, 2013.

Everything was going so well for the couple. They were happy and the family was together. But, things did not remain problem-free for long. The death of four close family members, including her grandmother and mother, created more challenges to overcome. She had promised her mother she

would care for her younger sister, Chi-Chi, who was born with downs syndrome. Also, she was evicted from her grandmother's home, since it now belonged to an uncle who had inherited it. She had lost her home and her family ties to Puerto Rico when her mother and grandmother died.

Damaris moved to Schenectady from Puerto Rico last fall with her husband and developmentally disabled sister. Her oldest daughter lived in Schenectady, so she came here with the hope of having a new start. They were homeless and stayed temporarily with her daughter, who has two children, in their two-bedroom apartment just until they could get on their feet. The landlord discovered them in the apartment and began eviction proceedings. In addition to homelessness, they don't speak English, they are in recovery from drug addiction and Damaris suffers from health problems as a result of being HIV positive. She also struggles with bipolar episodes. Damaris said, "I was desperate! My sister and I needed medication, but I didn't know where to go; we couldn't speak English and we didn't know our way around. A nurse at the health clinic sent me to SCAP. When I heard the SCAP counselor speaking Spanish, for the first time I was so happy! I knew we were going to be ok."

Damaris' husband found a job and SCAP found them a permanent apartment along with some of the essential household furnishings they needed. SCAP will continue to monitor and work with Damaris and her family to ensure they remain safe and stable, and have the resources they need to provide for themselves. "Being homeless is the most difficult thing to face, especially when you have a family," continued Damaris. "My dream is to have a little house of my own someday. I don't care how many rooms my house has, I just want to know we will always have a roof over our heads."

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