

## “Every Time I See a Wall Go Up I Know I Made the Right Decision...”

### Diana’s Story



You could say that signs pointed to Diana’s eventual homeownership of a Habitat house for years before it came to pass. Her father, a carpenter, used to give his young daughter a hammer and tiny nails as his pretend assistant. For her public speaking class at Holyoke Community College, Diana was assigned the task of preparing a speech on a nonprofit organization and she chose Habitat for Humanity. And as a volunteer at Casa Latina, Diana helped many immigrants and refugees for whom English was not their primary language navigate the local service landscape, including how to find affordable housing. All this before being chosen in the lottery process as the future homeowner for one of the homes being built on land donated by the Amherst Community Land Trust.

Diana knows herself how difficult it is not to speak the native language and to have to learn not only a new language but a whole new way of life as well. She came to western Massachusetts from Colombia as a young mother pregnant with her second child. She describes being taken in by kind members of College Church after her divorce and being homeless. She tells of sharing a room with her two children or sometimes finding a small studio apartment as she juggled cleaning homes and delivering newspapers early in the morning with parenting and attending classes to learn English and get her associates degree.

One day in 2016, she sat in the home of a friend who had recently moved into a Habitat home and the friend talked excitedly of the process that had led her to the day she finally held in her hand the keys to her new house. Her friend tried to convince Diana that she was ready to take this step herself. Diana resisted, but then said, “You know...I’m gonna do this!” A few months later, she was on the path to homeownership.

Diana describes the sense of community she experiences on the build site, working shoulder to shoulder with “strangers who are giving their time to build a house that’s for someone else. And they are happy to do it!” She says this makes *her* happy and she is so grateful for the patience of the build team leader, Walt, and all of the community volunteers who are welcoming and helpful.

But building her home isn’t all that Diana is doing. She now works in the Head Start program at Community Action, helping families in Hampshire county finding affordable childcare. She is an active volunteer, doing things like preparing taxes for low income families and serving as a member of Families with Power, empowering families in Northampton to build community together.

Diana has put her schooling on hold while she completes the building of her home. “Every time I see a wall go up, I know I made the right decision,” she says with a huge smile. She says that the elimination of stress caused by having to move so often and the stability offered by finally being in a house that is her own home will give her the foundation she needs to go on to pursue her BA. She has her sights set on Mt. Holyoke or Smith. Her daughter, meanwhile, has her own sights set on finally being able to have the pets she wants. And, as she says with a smile at her mom, “We are really lucky. Not everyone gets a house. But we do!”

