



Photos by Charlie Leche

Kiva Bailey poses with three of her children, Donald, Alexis and Cory.

Coming Home: The New Orleans Women's Shelter

2014 Impact 100 Grant Recipient

The New Orleans Women's Shelter is truly a home. Each family has their own bedroom. The communal spaces—upstairs, downstairs, and in the backyard—are warm and welcoming, with comfortable furniture and plenty of toys for the kids. There are even two pet turtles that a family brought from California. The shelter's walls are adorned with beautiful artwork, much of which was created by the women and children in residence. Many of the repairs are done by staff members' husbands.

Family Impact

"It's nice here, it's comfortable," says Kiva Bailey. "It's a relief."

Kiva and her five children have been living at NOWS since November. It is the first stable home environment they have had in a long time.

When they first arrived, the things they needed help with included clothing, soap and towels. Now Kiva is getting assistance in finding a job. She wants to get one cleaning offices, like she did before Katrina.

"We have employment class Monday through Thursday 9 to 11," says Kiva. "We look up jobs on the computer and fill out applications. The teacher will point out different job opportunities that might come up. They'll help you set up an interview, and when you get one, they'll go over there with you."

Shelter staff help the residents identify their employment and/or educational goals, and then help them focus on achieving them. There is no time limit on how long a woman can stay at NOWS,

as long as she is actively making progress toward her goals and following house rules, including doing chores. All residents are also required to open a savings account, which the shelter will match at 25% when the family is ready to move. The average length of stay is 6 to 9 months. NOWS has dedicated \$50,000—half of the Impact 100 grant—to expanding its capacity so that it can serve an additional 25 women and children this year.

Kiva's children love the activities at the shelter, including movie nights, game nights, and an Easter celebration with face painting, an egg hunt, and ice cream.

"The kids are always looking forward to the next thing," says Kiva. "We call my oldest boy Donald 'The Investigator' because he knows what's happening before I do."

Kiva's youngest boy, Cory, had been so nervous and shy that he was scared to go to the bathroom by himself, and Kiva used to have to go to his school and sit with him while he took a test. But since moving into the shelter, he's beginning to come out of his shell.

"Here, he's a different person," says Kiva. "He talks. He gets along with everybody around here. They like to joke with him."

Kiva's middle daughter, Pamela, is quiet at school, but at the shelter, she likes to sing and dance and put on plays for the residents. She has taken to calling herself Beyoncé.



All five children attend the same school. For next year, Kiva's oldest daughter Kala has been accepted into both Ben Franklin and Lusher—the first student to do so from her school.

Kiva and her children love babies, and they get to know each new family that arrives. They are also enjoying being back in New Orleans after nearly 10 years in Houston post-Katrina. On weekends, they walk together to the park, Canal Street or the Riverwalk.

Continuing Support

Once a woman has found a home at NOWS, it will always remain a safe and welcoming place she can go to get whatever help she may need to maintain her newfound or newly regained stability.

“The people who leave all want to come back,” says L'Oreal Ranson, case manager.

NOWS has dedicated \$50,000—the other half of the Impact 100 grant—to expand TAP, the Transition Assistance Program. NOWS now has the funding in place to keep TAP up and running for the next two years. As part of the grant, they've hired a new case manager to focus solely on TAP, freeing up the other case managers to focus on current residents.

“TAP is very important,” says Dawn Bradley-Fletcher, executive director. “Things can happen, and you still need a support system. It could be that you are having trouble paying rent, or with transportation for your kids to get to school. We're still there. We'll help you funnel through life's challenges and difficulties. We don't want you to become homeless again.”

TAP offers to former residents all of the same case management services they had while in residence, plus money management skills, social skills, shopping and cooking skills, and community involvement. Former residents can come back for whatever they may need, from attending a support group to using the fax machine.

When a woman comes to the shelter after being homeless, whomever helps her first will be someone she will trust and feel safe with thereafter. For that reason, the TAP case manager will be the one to do intakes—a lengthy, detailed process which can take two hours. Later, when the woman is ready to transition out of the shelter, she'll feel comfortable going back for help to the case manager who did her intake—her first point of contact.

Outside the dining room, Ms. Ranson points out a framed painting of the shelter, a creation and gift of a former resident. Another former resident, who has taken up sewing, comes back regularly to teach sewing classes and offer clothing repairs. Yet another former resident, now serves on the organization's Board of Directors.

Grantee At-A-Glance

\$100,000—total Impact 100 grant to NOWS

\$50,000—dedicated to increasing shelter capacity

\$50,000—dedicated to expanding TAP, including hiring new case manager

100%—percentage of Impact 100 grant which NOWS plans to match through other donors

\$35,000—raised to date towards the match (by May 15)

Additional Facts

\$0—program cost to women and children

125—number of women and children served by NOWS in 2014

150—number of women and children NOWS plans to serve in 2015

114—women and children served so far in 2015 (by May 15)

\$100—amount donated to each resident by NOWS board members after winning Impact 100

