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Shelter helps once homeless mom rebuild her life

By [Mary McCarty](#), Staff Writer

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JIM NOELKER Chandie Dow dresses her one-year-old daughter Jazzmine. Last Christmas Dow was living at St. Vincent Homeless Shelter in the evening and spending the day at Miami Valley Hospital with her premature baby. Dow now lives in her own apartment with her healthy one-year-old girl.

When she was pregnant and homeless, living at St. Vincent de Paul Hotel, Chandie Dow constantly reassured her unborn child, “You and I are going to make it through this.”

“Mommy’s not always going to live like this.”

At first, it didn’t seem as if Dow would be able to keep her promise to her baby daughter, Jazzmine, who was born 10 weeks premature and weighing a mere 2 pounds, 9 ounces.

It was far from certain that Jazzmine would survive — she had to be resuscitated at birth —but Dow chose to believe the reassurances of her nurses at Miami Valley Hospital: “She’s feisty. She’s going to make it.”

Jazzmine just celebrated her first birthday and everyone has the identical reaction to the pink-cheeked baby with her mother’s ice-blue eyes: “She’s the Gerber baby!”

Dow’s caseworker, Megan Dell, calls her a “great mom who shares an incredible bond with her daughter.”

Dow is making strides toward independence as she prepares to leave St. Vincent’s Supportive Transitional Housing program, which has provided her with an apartment in Kettering for the past year. She’s moving into permanent housing in Miamisburg under the auspices of Miami Valley Housing Opportunities, another agency that works with the homeless.

Promise fulfilled



JIM NOELKER Chandie Dow and her one-year-old daughter Jazzmine. Dow is moving into permanent housing in Miamisburg under the auspices of Miami Valley Housing Opportunities, an agency that works with the homeless.

Dow ended up at the shelter when she couldn't find work after moving to Dayton in a failed attempt to be reunited with her 14-year-old son from her first marriage. "The pregnancy was bad timing for me and my life," Dow admits. "But apparently it was the right timing for God."

Her evidence: 1-year-old daughter Jazzmine, whose chubby legs and perpetual gummy grin seem to contradict the circumstances of her birth. "She has no idea her mother was living in a homeless shelter when she was born," Dow said. "She is absolutely perfect. And it means absolutely the world to me after having lost four babies to miscarriage before this."

Dow couldn't have gotten to this point, she knows, without the help of the St. Vincent de Paul Hotel, where she lived during the last months of her pregnancy. "I have no idea where I'd be without St. Vincent's help," she said. "It was not an easy situation, living with so many people while I was pregnant, but I'm so grateful they were there."

The agency not only provided emergency shelter during her pregnancy but also made sure she received proper nutrition and regular visits to the obstetrician. Dow suffered from pre-eclampsia — pregnancy-induced hypertension— causing the baby to be born 10 weeks' prematurely. During the seven weeks the baby was hospitalized, Dow moved into her Kettering apartment with assistance from St. Vincent's Transitional Housing program, which subsidized her rent as well as providing a car seat, crib and other necessities.

Jazzmine weighed 4 pounds, 13 ounces, when Dow brought her home; her preemie outfits looked like doll clothes. On her first birthday Dec. 4 she weighed nearly 20 pounds and made an unholy mess with her cupcake. "She's a little behind in some areas, but she's catching up quickly," Dow said.

Her caseworker Megan Dell said she's impressed with Dow's progress during the past year as well as her selflessness as a mother. "It's rare that I hear from Chandie that she needs something for herself," Dell observed. "It's almost always because she needs something for Jazzmine."

Now Dow and her baby are scheduled to move into permanent housing in Miamisburg through Miami Valley Housing Opportunities. “Our goal is to get her into something permanent, and that’s what she’s doing,” Dell said.

MVHO chief executive officer Natalie Harris said it’s an example of the partnership within agencies that has been encouraged by the Homeless Solutions Partnership Board: “It’s exciting to see people move from step to step without too many bumps along the way. Each of the housing openings have been available when she needed them, and that’s how the system should work.”

At the homeless shelter Dow forged an unlikely friendship with a 26-year-old IV drug user named Rebecca Thayer. “She distanced herself from that environment because she didn’t use drugs,” Thayer recalled, “yet stayed close enough to let me know she was still there for me.”

When Thayer, too, became pregnant, Dow urged her, “You need to think about your baby.”

It was when Thayer felt her baby move for the first time that she finally listened and checked herself into a women’s treatment facility in Cincinnati. “When I saw that Chandie was able to make it, it gave me hope that I would be able to make it too,” Thayer said. “Coming out of the homeless shelter I made a lifelong friend. She’s my sister.”

Thayer has been sober since July 18 and she gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Sofia, Oct. 31, with Dow as her birth coach and cheerleader. Dow paid a friend \$50 — money she couldn’t hardly spare — to drive her to Cincinnati so she could be there for Sofia’s birth.

“It meant so much for me to be there for her, because she’s my best friend and she didn’t have anyone else,” Dow recalled. “I even got to cut the cord.”

It’s not the only bond Dow is in the process of severing. When her daughter is a little older, Dow hopes to pursue a criminal justice degree at Sinclair Community College. She would like to become a probation officer because “living at St. Vincent’s I realized there are a lot of good people on parole and probation who are going through hard times. I want to be able to help.”

“There are people out there living every day with absolutely nothing,” she said. “I was like that. Now I’m rebuilding my life.”

Contact this reporter at (937) 225-2209 or mmccarty@DaytonDailyNews.com.



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Last Christmas, Chandie Dow had a picture of her premature daughter, Jazzmine, on her locker at St. Vincent Homeless Shelter.