

Success is a Transformed Life



Thalia Smalls with CEO Nancy Yancey

By Nancy Yancey
CEO
Rainbow Village

I want to share the inspiring message from this year's **Future of Promise Award** recipient to those attending our 2017 We are Family Gala.

Thalia Smalls and her family lived at Rainbow Village 10 years ago and here is her story. ...

"Ms. Nancy has been a positive attribute to my life for a while now. She knows me and my family very well.

I have an older brother named Ronald. We are graduates from the Rainbow Village program. Before we came to the program, my Mom and Dad were at a very low place, not only financially but mentally and emotionally.

Back then, there was so much to be angry about with very little to be happy about. My father was never very supportive of my mom, my brother or me.

But my mom is a very strong woman. She was the one who supported me and my brother. She played both roles as a parent in my life. After a series of problems, I assume it became overwhelming. My mom decided enough was enough!

We moved to my uncle's house to escape the problems between my mom and dad. My brother, my mom and I shared a king size bed in the basement of my uncle's two-story home, but we still didn't feel accepted. Living with our own family we could tell they were beginning to grow tired of us.

I was only 8 years old when my mom told my brother and me we were moving. We didn't know where to and we didn't know how far. We just knew we would finally have a place to call our own.

It's crazy to think that that was 10 years ago! She told me they were going to help us and that we would all be safe there. That

sounded good to me. Being so young, my mind couldn't put the pieces together that they do now.

The reality was that my mom was running out of sanity. She needed to be at peace without the presence of my father or anyone making her and her kids feel unaccepted. So we moved, out of my uncle's basement into a 2 bedroom apartment we could finally call our own at Rainbow Village. It was a blessing!

And although I didn't know back then what I know now... it was a program where my mom didn't feel financially embarrassed. Because in the program, there were families just like us... struggling just like us.

Rainbow Village is an amazing program because it brings families together to prosper. Seeing my mom go from being emotionally and mentally unstable to being an independent working woman was amazing. I got to see my mother build herself up and have people by our side who genuinely cared about our well-being. It was such a great feeling.

The reason I loved the program so much as a child was because of their interaction and time spent with us - from after school tutoring and mentoring to family and holiday dinners to holiday shopping and activities. It was all so fun!

Since the program my family has been doing great. My mom has kept a stable job and a healthy source of income to support herself. My brother and I have both graduated from high school. My brother graduated in 2014, and I'm a recent 2017 graduate, not to mention we were the first to do that within our family!

I'm 18 years old, employed, working to support myself at a young age. My older brother who was 11 years old when we were in the program is now 23 years old. He's an active duty officer in the U.S.

Army and living in Japan with his wife. So it's amazing to say all of us are doing well and working towards our goals.

The most important and valuable outcome of Rainbow Village is ending the cycle of poverty, domestic violence, and homelessness. And although everyone struggles financially, the goal is for children to be placed on a higher pedestal so they can succeed and we won't have to see all the struggles our parents did. It made me and my brother understand why it is so important to stay committed to your goals while you are young. We wanted our family to be proud of us... and they are.

I'm sure many of you wonder.....so what are your plans now? I'm a young adult and I have so many plans for myself. I am an aspiring educator. I want to teach mathematics for grades 9 through 12. I want to teach and guide students before they are freed into the "real world".

Teaching is a passion of mine. And the part that is really amazing is that I get to practice in a setting I once was. I recently began tutoring at the Rainbow village after school program and it's truly a blessing to be able to mentor those kids who are in the same exact place I once was.

The after school program is built where my home was when we were residents of Rainbow Village. That was 10 years ago. I am so thankful for Ms.Nancy, Ms. Sondra Blue and everyone else associated with this program. It is a blessing to those who need it and it changed not only my life but my mom's and brother's as well. Again, I'm so so thankful and I'm excited to be able to give back to my community. Thank you everyone."

Thalia is one of many young adults that now have promising futures due to the support of Rainbow Village. She was the average age of a homeless person when she lived there at the age of 8.

Since 1991 Rainbow Village has transformed lives of homeless families with children by providing a stable community and services that instill initiative, self-development and accountability for future generations. More than 1000 lives have been transformed at Rainbow Village and with your help many thousands more will be changed.

Visit our website to learn more and donate to support the transformation of future Thalia's. www.rainbowvillage.org