

Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad Graduates Its First Family

Homeless Family Moves In to New Habitat For Humanity Home

For first-time homeowner Kelcy Moorefield, her home's bright, yellow color means a "fresh start."



On Thursday, June 10, she and her husband, Bill, were presented the keys to a new, yellow and brick frame house at a key dedication ceremony, thanks to Habitat For Humanity who built it and Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad who shepherded the family for three years. The ceremony was held on the front-porch of the home which is located in a neighborhood undergoing revitalization in the 1400 block of Garfield Ave. in Winston-Salem. With the help of volunteers from their church, the family will move into the home June 22, the day of closing on their mortgage.

"We're excited about the Moorefields joining the Habitat community on Garfield Avenue. They will be one of 16 new families in an ambitious revitalization of the whole neighborhood that we're proud to be the catalyst for," said Habitat For Humanity of Forsyth County Executive Director Sylvia Oberle. "It is a wonderful demonstration of the community pulling together-professionals, craftsmen, church and student volunteers-working with the families to create hope and opportunity."

Elated about moving into a new home they can call their own with their three young children, the key ceremony also symbolized an unofficial graduation for the couple. The Moorefields have completed a three-year family and financial mentoring program sponsored by Winston-Salem-based, Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad.

According to the nonprofit organization's executive director, Todd Lusk, the ministry helps homeless families transition to home ownership by teaching critical life skills including financial budgeting. To qualify for the program, one and two-parent families must meet the definition of homelessness under HUD guidelines and not have income greater than 150% of poverty level.



Rescued by Stepping Stones Ministries, the Moorefields easily qualify. The family has had more than its share of medical problems. Two of their three children were born with birth defects. The youngest, a boy age 3 ½, has gastro esophageal reflux disease due to a birth defect that required multiple surgeries to create a missing piece of esophagus leading to the stomach. When he was born doctors thought that he would not live longer than three months. The middle child, a boy age 6, was born autistic. Bill, 48, has his own share of medical problems, rendering him disabled. He walks with a cane, has no feeling in his left leg, suffers from severe migraines, and wears a pain patch. In 2007, he injured his back in a work-related accident at a sawmill and was placed on permanent disability. Fortunately, Kelcy and the oldest child, a girl age 10, are healthy. Kelcy recently completed coursework at Guilford Community College where she earned certification in medical billing and coding. The family's numerous medical prescriptions and co-pays take a lion's share of the family's monthly income.

To help make ends meet, Bill said they live "the old-fashioned way." Bill started a small front-yard garden and Kelcy frequents a farmers market to buy bulk fruits and vegetables for canning, creating her own mix of specialty jams. She said preparing food for canning is a family affair and that the 3½ year-old gets special pleasure from the sound of "snapping" the green beans before they are boiled. She also makes her own laundry detergent using borax and common household ingredients as well as diaper wipes to save money.



Lusk said he heard about the Moorefields in 2007 through Clemmons First Baptist Church. The family was "adopted" by the church upon the referral of a co-worker of Kelcy's at the time who knew of the family's string of misfortunes. Before entering the program, Lusk said the family had been living in Sandy Ridge in a dilapidated "shack" with the ground showing through the

bathroom floor. Adding to their medical and financial hardships, Kelcy had to drive daily to Winston-Salem to take their youngest child to Brenner Children's Hospital to care for his gastro esophageal reflux. That was reason enough for Ardmore Baptist Missions Coordinator Rob Lemons, who also serves as Stepping Stones Board Chairman, to recommend that his church help the family by offering for rent a two-bedroom house used for out of town visitors that they had planned to sell. The home is located on Elizabeth Ave. in the Ardmore neighborhood which is close to the children's hospital and clinics, saving the family travel time and gas expense.

"Working with the Moorefields to reach this moment has been a tremendous experience. As our program's first family, it took a lot of resources from various places to make this happen," Lusk said. "I applaud Clemmons First Baptist Church and Ardmore Baptist Church for their caring members and willingness to help. But as far as getting Habitat for Humanity involved in building a home, that was all Kelcy's doing after we gave her a name to contact."



Lusk said Kelcy was extremely determined to own a home and that she took the initiative to contact Habitat For Humanity to apply for acceptance into the program and then excitedly called Stepping Stones to tell them what she had done. Habitat for Humanity accepted and approved the family's application to participate in the home ownership program along with the family's commitment to invest 400 hours of "sweat equity." Her determination is remarkable and a reason why she and her husband are successful graduates of the Stepping Stones program, he said.

Lusk, who was with the family when their youngest was able to eat solid foods and crackers for the first time after corrective surgeries, said he is excited for the family's future.

"They may be leaving our program technically, but they'll always be a part of our family because they've already said that they want to help in the future with other families," he said. "It's like a multiplication discipleship project. I can see where we poured so much into them, yet they are now pouring so much into us."

Kelcy said while Clemmons First Baptist Church "pretty much kept us living," she and Bill worked diligently to complete the three-year program offered by Stepping Stones because they were the ministry's first family and felt a "special responsibility."



"God made all of this bloom," Kelcy said. "Our faith and love for Him has gotten us through, and now we're going to be moving into our own home where the children will have a backyard to play."

Still, the path to homeownership and a sense of stability has been a long one for Kelcy and Bill—more like a trail of tears. Kelcy was hopeful that her second marriage to Bill would give her another chance to make a home for herself and her two-year old daughter, a home filled with love and laughter, something she had never experienced in her own life growing up in Mississippi. As a child, Kelcy was shuttled back and forth in custody battles between her mother who was married three times and her father six times. Tragically, her mother kept marrying abusive men,

with Kelcy often sharing the verbal and physical beatings as well. Each time there was an incident Kelcy was shipped off to her father who moved to Texas. But each time her father divorced and lived alone, Kelcy would have to go back to live with her mother in Mississippi and her new husband. Then the horrific cycle would start all over again. The domestic abuse against her mother was so bad Kelcy's cousin shot and killed her first step-father. Fighting back tears, she said her grandmother who was her "constant" provided comfort and taught her to have faith in God during difficult times. But her hope was delayed. When Kelcy was old enough to move away at age 18, she married her boyfriend and gave birth to her daughter, but he turned out to be abusive and she divorced him.

Bill's childhood growing up in Burlington was not much easier. Bill does not remember much about his father except that he was an alcoholic who made his living selling moonshine, which landed him in and out of prison. Earning very little money as a seamstress, Bill's mother moved him and his sister into a converted school bus camper, parked on his grandparents' property. He remembers eating a lot of "biscuits and gravy," his mother's specialty. As early as age eight, he was "pulling tobacco" in nearby fields and when he reached 16, hampered by dyslexia, Bill quit school to work full-time in the fields. Describing himself as a hard worker who was always eager to accept the most challenging jobs, he continued to work for more than three decades until his back injury.



Hoping they could build new lives as a couple their troubles began not long after they exchanged wedding vows. They first met at a Burlington sawmill a little more than eight years ago where they both worked. Kelcy was a clerk and Bill worked in the mill. They began dating and married a year later. Despite their 18-years-age-difference which Kelcy believes is a positive for male and female relationships, Bill's quiet manner, tenderness toward her, and his kindness to her daughter, then two years of age, convinced Kelcy that it was time to let go of the past, start anew, and grow a family. But her dream of happier times was short-lived due to their mounting health and financial problems. Hope returned when they were rescued by those willing to lend them a helping hand.

"Their marriage has not only survived...it's become a stronger, very foundational marriage," Lusk said. "There are in sync. They dance together on everything. It's been great to see and that is

what Stepping Stones was designed to do through the collaboration of churches, volunteers, and individuals to help families reach self-sufficiency."

Lusk said the ministry's mission is to bring all the people, agencies and churches together so underserved homeless families in the Triad can recover, not just financially, but better "holistically, in their health and spiritual well-being, and as a family."

"People know of Stepping Stones and its program to help homeless families. But, we as a community need more avenues and opportunities for families to enter into transitional or public housing supportive services," Lusk said. "We pull resources from wherever we can get them-volunteer resources from our churches, and professionals who may give their time and services."

Lusk said Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad began as a mission project of the member churches of the Pilot Mountain Baptist Association. As the program succeeded in serving homeless families, it was suggested by Winston-Salem city officials associated with the "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness" as well as PMBA leadership to break away from the PMBA umbrella, incorporate as a nonprofit, and reach out to other churches across nondenominational lines. In January 2009, the Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad was incorporated.

Quoting Stepping Stones founder, Karen Taylor, Lusk said, "The people who are most successful in the program are those who have been hungry and truly homeless, and they never want to be hungry or homeless again."

For the Moorefields the yellow and brick frame house on Garfield Avenue is a dream come true, but for Todd Lusk at Stepping Stones Ministries of the Triad it means one less homeless family living on the streets.