

# Opening New Doors

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**T**he dedication outside the Pratt Street Transitional Housing facility reads “Opening New Doors.” Mishonda Holdclaw is one individual for whom that phrase has real life meaning. She came to Pratt house when she could no longer stay with family. New to Maryland and caring for two children, Mishonda found herself in need of a safe and structured place for her family. Pratt House is a temporary living facility offering families a 24 month lease and enrollment in a Housing Readiness Program. Upon successful completion of the program a recommendation letter is sent to the Baltimore Department of Public Housing allowing the residents to transition out of supportive housing and into permanent homes.

“When I came I wasn’t used to the rules.” Says Mishonda “That’s the first thing I had to get used to.” Those rules include mandatory participation in several group meetings held on the premises. These groups are designed to educate residents on financial literacy, housing readiness and parenting.

“The Housing Readiness Group was the most helpful” says Mishonda who has successfully completed the program and is moving into permanent housing. “They taught me things I didn’t even think of, like checking all the sockets and smoke detectors before you move in.”

Practical learning groups at Pratt House also include nutrition, hygiene and housekeeping. The goal is to prepare residents to not only transition from homeless shelters into permanent housing, but to also maintain a safe and structured environment for their families. In addition to groups, Pratt House also requires residents to participate in chores, maintain a curfew and successfully pass unit inspections.

“You have to meet 3-month goals to move up in the program.” Mishonda says “Things like increase your bank account, attend the required groups and maintain employment.” These goals establish a sense of personal responsibility for each of the 35 families living at Pratt. “The program is good; it gets a lot of young people with children off the streets.”

Though she admits it was difficult for her to acclimate to the requirements in the Pratt House living agreement, she says that the structure has not only helped her, but her children as well. “My daughter isn’t as shy as she used to be, she loves attending the dance group and playing with the children here.”

Pratt is home to nearly 100 children ranging in age from infants to high school students. “We offer several groups for the children here,” says Case Manger Carolyn Eaddy. “We have summer camp activities and after school volunteers who tutor our children.”

“The program offers a lot; if you don’t know how to clean, someone will personally come and help you. If you’re having trouble parenting your children, someone will come and sit with you and help you” says Mishonda. In addition to the practical skills programs, Pratt House also offers community events complete with DJs, use of the community room for children’s birthday celebrations and a shared sense of empowerment that is a hallmark of Volunteers of America Chesapeake. In Partnership with the Housing Authority residents leave Pratt equipped with the knowledge and skills to live on their own and maintain their independence.

“If you want to be independent and get something out of this you will. They’ll give you all the tools, you just have to use them.” says Mishonda. “



*To learn more about Mishonda and the families at Pratt House please visit our website [www.VOACHesapeake.org](http://www.VOACHesapeake.org) You can also learn more about how to help us rebuild the playground that serves the children of Pratt House by clicking on the “Donate Now” button and selecting Pratt House.*



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