

PERSEVERANCE AND A CARING COUNSELOR SAVE A FAMILY'S HOME

A homeowner facing foreclosure can feel deeply alone. As the family's bills pile up, collectors can be relentless in their phone calls. On top of all this financial pressure, the prospect of being homeless can be frightening. But, as Katherine Stone learned firsthand, help is available.

Katherine is a single mother of two children in their 20s, both of whom still live at home. They've been in their two-story, three-bedroom home in Connellsville, Fayette County, for the past decade.

LOSS OF A JOB THREATENS THE FAMILY HOME

In 2009, when Katherine lost her job as a nurse's aide, her home could have been in jeopardy. But financial assistance through the Emergency Homeowners' Loan Program (EHLP) kept her current on her mortgage. By the time that assistance ended in March 2013, Katherine was working again — this time providing personal care in a group home for people with disabilities. But 50 percent of her income went toward paying her mortgage. Financially, Katherine was living on the edge.

That's when housing counselor Rita Masi came into the picture. Rita works for the Fayette County Community Action Agency, which is part of PHFA's statewide network of counseling agencies. Rita met with Katherine and, once they looked at the numbers, they knew they had to take immediate action. Working together, they were relentless in their communications with Katherine's lender to seek a home loan modification.

A COUNSELOR'S INVOLVEMENT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Dealing with the mortgage company was frustrating. Four times during three months they had to resubmit all their paperwork, often for seemingly minor omissions.

"There were times I wanted to cry or scream," Katherine shakes her head. "But Rita would say, 'Katherine, don't give in yet.'"

Without the help of a housing counselor, Rita doubts that Katherine would have gotten her loan modification. But working in tandem and supporting each other, they ultimately were successful.

"I think having a counselor helped with the negotiations," Rita reflects. "It helped the loan servicer realize Katherine was serious about keeping her home, and she would do whatever she needed to do to follow through on that process."

Today, Katherine's mortgage, which once was \$775 a month, is now a more manageable \$458. She and her children are grateful for the guidance from Rita that saved their house and now lets them create more happy family memories together in the place they call home. 🏠

