



Family, volunteers, and members of the Shadow Wood Charitable Foundation attend the ceremony welcoming Yalena Perdomo to her new Habitat for Humanity home. PHOTOS BY ANDREA STETSON/SPECIAL TO THE BANNER

Realizing the dream

‘Hard path’ leads to Bonita Springs home for Honduran immigrant, with an assist from Habitat for Humanity

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Yalena Perdomo’s story is the American dream. She’s an immigrant from Honduras who overcame struggles with poverty and housing, by sheer perseverance. When she was told no, she just tried harder and it finally paid off. The morning of April 10, Perdomo was handed the keys to her new four bedroom Habitat for Humanity home in Bonita Springs. She will share her new abode with her four-year-old daughter and her mother.

It’s a dream come true for Perdomo who has been sharing a small bedroom in her sister’s Cape Coral home with her mother, daughter and dog. She’s been waking up before daylight to drop her daughter off at daycare and then head to work more than an hour away in Naples. Now they will have a much shorter commute and a place where they will each have their own bedroom.

The challenging journey began in 2000 when Perdomo was just 13 and her family migrated from Honduras to New York. It wasn’t easy in the big city so in 2014 she moved to Southwest Florida to start a new life with the dream of having a home for herself and her parents.

“It was tough when I started this journey,” Perdomo began. “But mom and dad took a risk taking us out of Honduras, and I didn’t want to still struggle like they did there. If are going to a new country, make the best of it.”

She moved from place to place always struggling to pay the rent. In 2017 she applied to Habitat for Humanity and got denied. She applied again in 2019 and was again denied. But Perdomo did not give up.

“What is great about those letters is they tell you specific why you don’t qualify so it is up to you to follow the directions or just give up,” she explained. “It was because of my



Yalena Perdomo embraces Melody Lineberry, HUD certified housing coordinator for Habitat for Humanity, during a ceremony welcoming Perdomo to her new home. Perdomo’s daughter Lindzey, 4, was excited about her new home.

See DREAM, Page 12A

Dream

Continued from Page 3A

collections, that's why I was denied."

Habitat recipients can't have big debts and they need to be able to pay a mortgage that is 30 percent of their income.

"She had a dream of having a home for herself and her daughter," said Melody Lineberry HUD certified housing coordinator for Habitat for Humanity. "Unfortunately at that point it was responded to with a letter saying she did not meet the requirements. For a lot of people it would have ended there."

But it didn't end. Perdomo she spent hours each month with Habitat counselors trying to find ways to pay her debts so she could qualify. She went over mortgage guidelines, and learned better money management. When she received a government Covid check, she used the money to negotiate payments to the three creditors. Finally, debt free, she applied to Habitat again last year.

"The time was finally right. She had the income and the requirements," Lineberry said.

Perdomo said it was her daughter that kept her going when it seemed impossible. "The thing that made me change my mentality was the day I found out I was pregnant," Perdomo described. "I want her to look up to me. I want her to have the drive and know if she wants to do it, she can do it."

She also wanted a better life for her daughter and mother. It was very cramped in the one bedroom they all shared. They had no privacy. Perdomo had to wake her daughter up before dawn to drive to daycare and then work.

"Sometimes we were in traffic for more than an hour," she described. "It was horrendous for her and it was draining for me."

Qualifying for a home was not the end of the struggles. Every applicant has to have 300 hours of equity helping to build Habitat Homes. That wasn't easy since Perdomo worked Monday through Friday and could only put in those hours on the weekend.

"I feel like people get discouraged when it comes to the 300 hours," she explained. "You think 300 hours and you think 'my God and on top of that you have life, you have jobs.' There was a time when I got scared because I needed to be done with my hours by March 31, so in February I started freaking out and



Habitat for Humanity built 14 homes on Partnership Place in Bonita Springs. The last two homes were finally complete and on Wednesday one of the houses was dedicated to the Perdomo family. ANDREA STETSON/SPECIAL TO THE BANNER

then in the middle of March I started freaking out that I would not make it."

She rallied friends, co-workers, family and even a Facebook friend to donate some hours. She said one lady donated 42 hours, helping her finally meet the requirement. Now the four bedroom, two bathroom, 1,400 square foot home is hers.

"I know this has been a very long process," Becky Lucas, CEO of Habitat told Perdomo. "It speaks to your resilience. I know it is not your first time applying for a habitat home. It means a lot to us that you placed your trust in us."

After the ceremony Lindzey ran into her new bedroom.

"It's going to be rainbow," she said about the color she wants. "And there will be a bed and star lights and lots of princess dresses."

Then she jumped up and down waving a flag as she sang, "my room, my room, my room."

Perdomo is most excited about having some privacy.

"I can have some quiet time," she described. "I just want stability and my own space."

Partnership Place off Bonita Drive was made possible by collaboration between sponsors and Habitat. Shadow Wood helped fund six of the 14 homes in that community, including Perdomos and the final home that will be dedicated very soon. Shadow Wood has had a partnership with Habitat for the past 17 years and has donated more than \$2.5 million to the organization.

"Our Partnership with Shadow Wood is like no other," Lucas stressed. "If we could just duplicate this all over our county what a different organization we could be and how much more of this critical issue of affordable housing we could impact."

Norm Wells, president of the board of trustees for the Shadow Wood Charitable Foundation, was happy to see the impact it is having on the Perdomo family.

"The wonderful thing is she has a place for her daughter and her mother," Wells said. "She is a hard worker and it is a wonderful story about someone who has come to this country and found a way to improve their lives and now has a stable home to raise her family."

Wednesday's ceremony was on the four year anniversary of Perdomo's father's death. She wishes he too could be moving into the new home, but she is happy that she can provide for her mother and daughter.

"Ever since I left New York I prayed every day just to be stable," Perdomo said. "I first did it for my parents. I wanted them to be proud. I wanted to give her a place where she could relax and just be happy. Now I am doing it for my daughter. When I left New York I didn't want to be one of the numbers of migrants that came here and did nothing. I didn't want to be moving every year. I wanted the stability."

During the ceremony, Pastor Steve Hayes of First Naples Church praised Perdomo's choices.

"You took the harder path, rather than the more common path," Hayes said.

But for Perdomo the biggest praise is from her daughter.

"Every time I bring her here she says 'mommy I am so proud of you' and she hugs me. It has just been a long long journey, but it has been a great journey."