

The
**UNION
MISSION**

MISSION NETWORK

Food, Clothing, Shelter ... and so much more!

MAY 2021



**"Faith is my currency.
I've been living by faith!"**

Details on page 2

**INSIDE: A Fresh Start for Dena and Her Girls | Legin Inspires Our Davids
New Beginnings and Growth | A Strong Family Heritage | Camp Hope Haven 2021**



Meet Dena

In November 2020, Dena, eight months pregnant, and her four girls came to The Union Mission. It was a hard transition, but “we needed to focus on our family.” Staying at the Women and Children’s Shelter gave Dena the respite and resources she needed to build a better future for her and her girls. “God took care of all our needs at the shelter!” she says. “It was a huge relief, though I had to get used to it.”

They loved their brightly decorated room with bunk beds, as well as the tasty meals in the dining room. Dena’s oldest three girls earned good grades at school online. Despite COVID, they

“The Union Mission was like a tree of shelter, with many branches of resources to help my family!”

always felt safe in the shelter, almost normal, though no one liked the 5 p.m. curfew.

But the nightly Bible studies encouraged them. Dena grew up in church, but “dabbled here and there” with other faiths. “But I was never denying the Lord,” she says. As she studied Scripture, it was like putting a plug into an electrical outlet. “The lights came on for me!” And “being at the shelter kept the girls in the Word at a level they could understand,” too. They loved the nightly devotions and “Bible Jeopardy.”

Dena says their time together at the Mission gave them “a rare blessing,” a sense of unity and empathy. The girls

were more open about their feelings and more understanding. “You’ve got to cherish those moments.”

Then, right before Christmas, Dena delivered a beautiful new daughter. She’d already benefitted from the staff’s kindness, assistance, and baby supplies, but they lavished Destiny LaFaith with love and gifts, too.

December was even more bountiful than expected. “I had told the girls that this might not be the biggest Christmas,” but “everything they put on their lists, the donors made it happen! It was a wonderful day!”

Two months later, the six moved into a beautiful three-bedroom townhouse in Chesapeake. Dena had been disappointed when two earlier houses fell through, “but God gave us something even better...sight unseen on blind faith. And we love it!”

Plus, the plumber who fixed the sink noticed that they needed more furniture. His sister had just downsized, so he brought them a TV, a bed, some side tables, and chairs—for free! “God’s grace and mercy are such a blessing!” Dena says.

Dena hoped to find a job at a Norfolk shipyard, but she recently interviewed for a retail position with more flexible hours near their new home. She’s hoping to hear some good news soon.

And the entire family is looking forward to visiting their shelter friends again soon. “I’m missing this place,” Dena says. “I confess that we got a little spoiled here. And all the staff...they became family to us. We didn’t want to leave. We really felt the unconditional love.”

“The Union Mission was like a tree of shelter, with many branches of resources to help my family!”

Dena, 34, never expected to find herself living in a homeless shelter, especially with her four girls and just a month from delivering her fifth.

She had always been independent. Raised by her grandmother until she was 10, she survived foster care, graduated from high school, earned her associates degree, trained as a massage therapist, worked hard, and had her own home. She took care of her girls without much support from their dads.

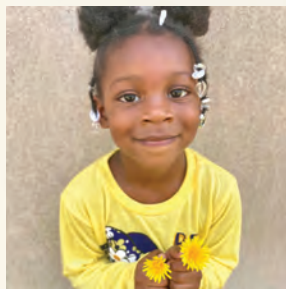
But last fall she “was falsely incarcerated” after getting drawn into a physical fight with a family member. It was part of a custody battle for her kids, Dena says, but investigators found no evidence of neglect or child abuse. Granted full custody, she didn’t want to stay with family.

Read more about Dena’s and her girls’ Union Mission experience.

... and her girls



DESTINY
4 Months



CARSON
3½ Years



TACOREYA
6 Years



MELODIE
8 Years



RAHTEAONA
12½ Years

What do you want to be when you grow up?

CARSON: A gymnastic girl!

TACOREYA: I want to be a police officer!

MELODIE: NOT a dentist [as her sisters suggested]! I wanna be a spy, like *K.C. Undercover*!

RAHTEAONA: I love animals! I want to be a veterinarian.

What did you learn about the Bible here?

CARSON: I liked when we was in Bible study here.

TACOREYA: I learned about Jesus, the God. He died on the cross and came back to life.

MELODIE: I love, love, love *Superbook*! And watching *Veggie Tales*!

RAHTEAONA: I enjoyed Bible Jeopardy. We played it on Friday.

What was your favorite food at the Mission?

CARSON: I love the pickles.

TACOREYA: I liked the mashed potatoes and gravy, oh, and the green beans.... And salad, but my mom makes the best food herself.

MELODIE: Not technically. Jesus makes the best food!

TACOREYA: And we had cherry pie—it was so sweet!

RAHTEAONA: I really liked the shepherd's pie.

ALL: Oooh, yes! The shepherd's pie was goood!

What was fun about staying at the shelter?

CARSON: I liked the way we was sleeping here—the bunk beds. I liked to like play down and up on them. Well, my mom says I need to sleep on the bottom bunk, but I was scared to sleep on the bottom, but I made a big giant tent for me on the bed, and Melodie helped me. And Tacoreya made a tent like a tower. And my mom said to take it down, but we didn't. [Giggles]

MELODIE: The closet in our room was so big, you could fit a whole bed in there! I could hide in there!

TACOREYA: Me and Rahti and Carson were playing Candy Land back in our room and we could pick any prizes we want if we win the game.

MELODIE: She's telling it all wrong. You didn't have to win it! You had to work together as a team. And there were toys for behaving children during Bible study, and only the people that deserved it was Destiny and Rahteona and me!

Did you have a favorite holiday at the Mission?

TACOREYA: Halloween has the best candy. You get Snicker bars, Skittles, oh, and Twizzlers. I like them, and so does Carson, but Melodie doesn't.

CARSON: I like Twix.

RAHTEAONA: I love Snickers.

MELODIE: We got candy for Valentine's Day, too.

RAHTEAONA: I really liked the Thanksgiving food. I think lunch was my favorite part of that day.

CARSON: I liked the turkey and the ham.

MELODIE: I thought Christmas was boring....I don't really know why.

OTHERS: No!!! Christmas was fun!

RAHTEAONA: Yeah! For Christmas I got a 2020 computer, a Chromebook, actually. I didn't know what it was at first. I never felt so many emotions. I couldn't believe it! It was my #1 thing I wanted other than a dog. It works really well! And I can use it for gaming and for school.

Dear Donors, Your money and donations really help families like mine! We came in with just what we had at the time and now we have so much more! Almost everything we needed was donated. Everything you give counts! Just keep giving!

Dena

GOOD ENUF



How can you put your best foot forward when you've always been told you won't be successful?"

"Where else will you end up but on the street if you've always been on your own?"

"Why bother trying any more when all you've done is fail and end up in jail?"

Legin leans in to listen as the young men open up about their haunting hurts. The Christian hip hop artist identifies with the giants—traumas, disappointments, attitudes—that our David Development guests are sharing. Like many of them, he grew up fatherless, feeling less-than, but, he preaches, “God says you are GOOD ENUF!”

“I came to realize the truth of Romans 5:8—that, even at my worst, Jesus thought I was worth dying for, and He still believes I’m worth it,” he tells the men. “Then I started going to counseling to deal with my issues of rejection.”

“We all face struggles and it’s easy to become overwhelmed,” Legin says. Plus, often there’s a stigma attached to mental health issues like depression, suicidal thoughts, PTSD, or anxiety, but “seeing a therapist doesn’t make your faith any less valid. My message is Trust God *and* Get Counseling, if needed.”

As Legin ministers, his music and spoken words soothe bruised souls. Soon the homeless men start talking about things they dared not discuss before.

“I’ve felt broken all of my life, man,” says one man who survived a traumatic childhood. “Thank you for helping me realize that what you say is true. If your body is broken, you visit a doctor. If your mind or heart is broken, why not be healed?”

The youngest David, raised by a demanding father, has tried counseling in the past. “I was always told negative stuff and that left me feeling, ‘What’s the use?’” but “tonight I’m going to bed thinking that I really can be successful.”

Choking back tears, a chronically homeless man shares his revelation: “It’s not what has happened that’s important, but what I’m going to do about what I’m feeling.”

“It’s too easy to think you’re alone—and that’s a dangerous place to be when you need help,” says another. “We need these kind of programs [and] relationships at The Union Mission!”

Already several of our Davids are receiving counseling to work through their issues, and the Mission hopes to partner with Legin again this year to help even more young men find healing and confidence in Christ.

PATH to PURPOSE Campaign

Our David Development Program rebuilds shattered young lives and breaks the cycle of generational homelessness.

More and more of our Men’s Shelter guests are young men ages 18–30 who need more than just food, clothing, and a safe place to sleep. They need help overcoming the traumas, stigmas, and negative attitudes that have defined their entire lives. They need wellness, social, and spiritual support to keep them from becoming homeless time and time again.

By equipping these young men with life skills, job readiness, improved mental health and emotional wholeness, training in parenting, relationships, finances, and emotional management, Christian discipleship, and more, they gain confidence and success. And that means that they, their children, and their families have a brighter future.

Help us raise the \$450,000 we need to expand this essential program with more life-changing services. With your support, our Davids will defeat the giants that taunt them and live in victory.

Please give today at unionmissionministries.org/purpose.

Looking for a job with eternal rewards?

View our openings or apply online at unionmissionministries.org/job-opportunities



5100 E. VIRGINIA BEACH BLVD.
NORFOLK, VA 23502
757-627-8686



To read more, search **Stories of Hope** at unionmissionministries.org.

Thank you
for Your
Generosity!



REV. JOHN W. GRAY, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's a season of new beginnings and growth here at The Union Mission Ministries. Spring has sprung across both of our campuses, with sunny days, singing birds, and spectacular blooms. Even better, we see renewal and restoration among our shelter guests as well. In spite of the very different and difficult year behind them and the challenges to come, they have a definite sense of hopefulness.

Former guests like Dena and her girls are walking into their futures ready and resilient thanks to their stay in our shelter. The young men in our David Development Program are facing down their giants to find healing and wholeness. And our RECLAIM residents are stepping up and moving out into permanent housing and brighter tomorrows.

Plus, starting later in June, Camp Hope Haven 2021 will run for six weeks on our rural Virginia Beach campus. The pandemic shuttered our plans for camp in 2020, but this year, with your help, we are delighted to provide a week of summer camp to underprivileged children from across Hampton Roads.

All of this is possible because of your generous and faithful giving! Your partnership in our ministry means the world to us. We thank God for your support and your prayers, but most of all we thank God for your heart to help! May He bless you richly as you have blessed The Union Mission Ministries!

In His service,

Rev. John W. Gray, Jr.
Executive Director

Change a child's life with a week at Camp Hope Haven!

For many kids, a week of summer camp is a treat their family cannot afford. But for just \$150, you can sponsor a child for a week of Camp Hope Haven. This June or July, they'll enjoy swimming, sports, horseback riding, team games, and Bible lessons on our beautiful campus in rural Virginia Beach. Introduce a child to the joy and love of Jesus.



Give today and transform a life!
donate.unionmissionministries.org/camp-hopehavenvb.org

Yes, Rev. Gray, I want to help women, men, and children find a new start!

I've enclosed: \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$150 \$_____

I would like to commit to a **monthly gift** of \$_____. My first gift is enclosed.

Method of Payment: Check VISA MasterCard American Express Discover

Card Number _____ CCV Code _____

Expiration Date _____ Signature _____

Please make your check payable to The Union Mission. To make an online donation, go to donate.unionmissionministries.org.



Please complete this slip and return it to The Union Mission with your generous gift. Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. We will send a receipt for your records.

05-2021



Pass Along a

Strong Family Heritage

Two daughters were comparing the less-than-desirable physical attributes they had inherited from their father. “I hate my freckles from Dad,” said the older one. “At least you got his freckles,” her unsympathetic younger sister replied, “I got his eyebrow!” (from *Readers’ Digest*)

Certain family traits pass naturally from one generation to the next—but values of faith and character often require a bit more effort. What values do you hope to nurture in your children and grandchildren?

Here are four everyday ways you can build a foundation of family values that will last for years to come:

Play

Enjoying fun times together as a family, both indoors and out, helps create a sense of belonging, ease tensions, and establish a joyful home.

Pray

Sharing in times of prayer as a family cultivates gratitude, deepens family unity, builds faith, and demonstrates how to trust in God.

Share

Speaking honestly from the heart nurtures connections and keeps lines of communication open as children grow into adults.

Give

Volunteering at a favorite charity or collecting donations to support a local cause can build family bonds, as does financial giving. A donor-advised fund allows your family to fund a single giving account, then direct individual gifts to support charities you value.

Together!

IT'S EASY TO INCLUDE THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES IN YOUR FAMILY GIVING!

To create a will that reflects your values and blesses others, visit www.christianwill.org/umm or contact Helen Sommer at 757-627-8686, x504 or legacygiving@ummnorva.org.

Comments / Change of Address:

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No person is denied service based on race, creed, gender, disability, or national origin.

Photos are representative of actual Mission clients.

If you would like to donate much-needed supplies, please see unionmissionministries.org/ways-to-give/give-goods. Thank you!

In the event contributions exceed expenses, extra funds will be used to feed, shelter, and care for the hungry and homeless throughout the year.

Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 919-807-2214 or 888-830-4989 for NC residents.

THE UNION MISSION MINISTRIES

P.O. BOX 3203 | NORFOLK, VA 23514 | 757-627-8686
info@ummnorva.org | www.unionmissionministries.org