

### SUCCESS STORY

# Tears of Joy

*Mother and daughter finally experience a taste of home.*

*“Everything changed when we came to this apartment.”*

While they were living in a shelter, Mia\* worked to make the limited space feel more like a home for her and her daughter. Mia bought a colorful bedspread. On the mini fridge, she hung some of her daughter Ana’s\* schoolwork. It was not easy: there was no kitchen and little privacy. “Living in the shelter is very hard. We did not have any room,” Mia says.

As an immigrant to the United States from Panama, Mia found navigating the shelter system especially hard. Her rights and the programs available to her weren’t always clear.

In 2022, Mia got an interview with a program supervisor from HousingPlus, shelter staff told Mia to treat the conversation like a job interview. “We were very nervous,” says Ana. “But when I met Mr. Robert,” Mia says, “It was comfortable.” Not long after that interview, Mia and Ana were finally moving.

That was a little over two years ago. “A lot has changed; everything changed when we came to this apartment,” says Mia. “I feel better.”

Ana has thrived in their new home. Now in 10th grade, she is taking elective classes in Spanish and Culinary Arts. Ana expresses her creativity by playing acoustic guitar and painting. “In recent years, I’ve been getting better, practicing. It’s really fun. I am trying to learn how to do cartoons,” she says. She gave HousingPlus a painting to hang in their offices.

Before school started this year, Ana created a Vision Board, and many of the things she features are culinary projects she wants to embark on.



*Mia and Ana signing the lease for their apartment.*

Their apartment’s kitchen makes what was previously impossible, possible: Ana and her mom can make food together. Their favorite dishes include food from Mia’s native country of Panama. “I really like cooking with my mom...making her country’s food like coconut rice.”

The two of them do a lot of activities together, like learning to make pumpkin pie or going ice skating. Of course when Mia signed the lease for a HousingPlus apartment in the summer of 2022, Ana was there. That day, both mother and daughter posed for a picture. “I cried,” Mia says. Ana chimes in, saying her mom also cried recently when HousingPlus staff brought them a television set. “It was because the weekend before they called us, we were looking at TVs so we could start saving up. The next week, Mr. Robert called and said ‘We have a surprise for you,’” says Ana. “I cried,” says Mia, “but it’s not sad tears.”

*\*Mia and Ana’s names have been changed to protect their privacy.*