‘New smile and spark’: Home makeover gives Garland family some welcoming spaces of their own

After a year in transitional housing, woman and her two kids are enjoying furnishings, decor and a stocked pantry from Dallas nonprofit Dwell With Dignity.



Kimberly Bobb (right) says thank you with a hug to Laura Cismesia, program director for Dwell With Dignity. The nonprofit group supplied Bobb's Garland home with furniture and decor that fit her family's needs.(Ben Torres / Special Contributor)

On a warm night in September, 38-year-old Kimberly Bobb sat down at her

new kitchen table and looked around, feeling overwhelmingly grateful.

Hours earlier, a joyful crowd of well-wishers had gathered to celebrate the reveal of Dwell With Dignity’s 200th life-changing interior makeover, this one in Bobb’s Garland house that she has worked so hard to provide for her family.

Over three days, while Bobb and her children, 13-year-old Daniel and 9-year-old D’Arie, stayed with relatives, a team of interior designers and creative volunteers created a safe, functional and soothing home environment for a family in need.

Each room of the 873-square-foot space had been transformed, filled with personal touches and furniture, original artwork, bedding, linens, kitchen supplies and a fully stocked pantry and fridge. When the trio walked back through their front doorway, they discovered a house that finally felt like home.

“We have a real, genuine space,” Bobb said. “We can come home and sit in the kitchen now, and sit in the living room, and when it’s time to go to bed, we have our own little spaces that we can go into and reflect on the day, get ready for tomorrow and just rest.”

Kimberly Bobb's newly decorated kitchen includes a full-size refrigerator, which replaces the too-small fridge her family had been relying on.(Ben Torres / Special Contributor)

Founded in 2009, Dallas-based nonprofit Dwell With Dignity partners with local social service agencies to help families escape poverty and homelessness through design — one household at a time.

Bobb was nominated for Dwell With Dignity’s gift of home furnishing by her case manager at Family Gateway, where the family lived in transitional housing for a year before moving in January to the home they now rent.

Like so many people one crisis away from homelessness, Bobb found her way to Family Gateway in 2019 after being laid off from her customer service job. She quickly landed another position, but at only half the pay, and has struggled to make ends meet.

“When we had to move out, it was staying in different hotel rooms and just moving around constantly trying to find somewhere to be every night,” Bobb recalled. “Even though I was still working, it wasn’t enough to get us back on our feet.”

Under Family Gateway’s accountability-based A Way Home program, Bobb learned to create and manage a monthly budget. After securing her current job as a health advocate for United HealthCare, she quickly paid off debts and started saving to ultimately fulfill her kids’ dream for a house with bedrooms to call their own.

D'Arie Bobb's newly redecorated bedroom includes nods to the 9-year-old's love of rainbows and outer space.(Ben Torres / Special Contributor)

Getting back on your feet is not the same as thriving, and that’s where Dwell With Dignity comes in.

Families who receive counseling, training and support from partner agencies often struggle to have the means to maintain an organized home that supports health and wellness. In Bobb’s case, most of the money she had saved while in transitional housing went to cover the cost of the move, which left their home “pretty much empty.” While she continued to put money aside to buy furniture, the kids slept on mattresses on the floor while Bobb took to the well-worn couch after her air mattress gave out.

Bobb’s journey is familiar to interior design pro Lisa Robison, who founded Dwell With Dignity in 2009. The nonprofit mainly relies on year-round donations of gently used items refurbished by hands-on volunteers and the money raised through Thrift Studio, a pop-up shop fundraiser that sells donated furniture, housewares, accessories and high-end designer goods to the public.

“Your surroundings have the opportunity to inspire your life,” says Robison, who remains chairman of the board. “They reflect and inform who you are, so when you are living in a situation of lack, your kids don’t want to come home after school, you don’t have a place to help them with their homework or a haven to express the beautiful family sentiments we all take for granted.”

It’s also the first empowering step to help families help themselves, says Laura Cismesia, Dwell With Dignity’s program director. She worked with the family to create a functional design plan, including adding Daniel’s request for their No. 1 need: a standard-size refrigerator to replace the too-small fridge they’d been relying on.

This time-well-spent was also when Cismesia learned that eighth-grader Daniel loved football, his fourth-grade sister D’Arie was into rainbows and outer space, and mom’s ideal retreat included a comfortable chair — design elements that showed up in the reveal of their bedrooms.

Daniel Bobb, 13, reacts with a smile as he sees his newly decorated bedroom in Garland. The team of interior designers and creative volunteers from Dwell With Dignity took note of the eighth-grader's love of football.(Ben Torres / Special Contributor)

“We talk to them about who they are as people,” Cismesia explains. “We want the families to take immediate ownership of it, and if it reflects who they are, they do that, and it makes them feel heard, which is really important.”

Not a single person Dwell With Dignity has supported has returned to a life of homelessness or a transitional shelter, according to the organization’s leadership. The nonprofit notes that each family’s newfound stability sparks a ripple effect that shows up in higher employment and graduation rates.

Bobb already sees a “new smile and spark” in her children, who feel settled in their refreshed space. Her recent experiences have Bobb looking to the

future.

“I’m feeling so optimistic,” Bobb said. “It was a huge blessing for this to take place, and you feel like anything from this point on is possible.”

How to help

To sponsor a fresh start for a family, volunteer or see a list of donation needs, visit dwellwithdignity.org.

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