

Dispatches: The Changing American Dream

Mom Finds Financial Empowerment through Local Services

Regina Berrios, mother of three, created a new life for her family after divorce left her in financial strain.

- By [Audrey Arthur](#)
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As children, we immediately recognize pop sensation concerts, homecoming games and seniors proms as the events that will serve as the milestones of our shallow youth.

But rarely do we recognize the silent strength of the women who have shaped our lives entirely.

Regina Berrios, mother of three, transformed her life dramatically to provide her children with the comforts that she had only dreamed of.

“It’s one of the biggest accomplishments of my whole life,” Berrios said. “It’s a dream come true.”

The Redwood City local came into financial crisis after divorcing her husband of more than 10 years.

“We never had a healthy relationship,” she said.

As a child growing up in impoverished El Salvador, Berrios was raised by her grandmother after her mother left her at a young age to move to the United States and her father was killed in the Salvadoran Civil War.

Distraught and hungry for change, 15-year-old Berrios ran away from home.

Within two years, she was married to an abusive husband and pregnant with her first child.

At 17, she moved to the U.S with her husband but felt confined from achieving her true potential while still married.

“I just got so tired,” Berrios said.

After years of broken trust, possessiveness and infidelity, Berrios left her husband to begin a better life.

However, with half of the family’s income gone and piling debt, Berrios turned to local family services in order to put her family on a track of success.

“There are a lot of places that are ready and willing to help,” she said.

Berrios utilized multiple Financial Empowerment services from the Peninsula Family Services to acquire a car and begin a savings schedule for the betterment of her family.

“They made a big change in my life,” she said. “And they made a big change for my family.”

Berrios was placed in a savings program that has given her the opportunity to place her 6-year-old son into a private Christian school.

She said her son initially had trouble with adjusting to his new life.

“Right now he can’t understand why his dad and I aren’t together anymore,” she said.

Still, she is confident that one day her son will see her sacrifice as a gift.

“It is a different environment over there,” Berrios said of her son’s new school. “He will have a different kind of discipline over there. He will have faith in God and God will give him better choices.”

Berrios has been recognized by several organizations for her success despite enormous obstacles including the Women’s Opportunity Award. The Peninsula Family Services at the annual Winners Celebration will also honor her Sept. 15.

But her major success will take place Sept. 10 when she will receive the keys and become a first-time homeowner.

Next Saturday Berrios and her family will move into their new three-bedroom condominium purchased with the help of Habitat for Humanity.

“I will own it,” Berrios said excitedly. “It will be my own place.”

Because of her savings acquired with the family services program, Berrios was successful in her application with Habitat for Humanity.

“Habitat for Humanity can see that I’m getting into the habit of saving,” she said.

With her new home, Berrios said her children will enjoy a loving, comfortable environment that she had always wished for.

“When I was in El Salvador, I always wished to have my own room,” she said. “My children will get to have that.”

Berrios continues with her success as a student at [Cañada College](#) where she hopes to pursue a career in social services to assist struggling teenagers.

“My inspiration is my three children and for me to better this society,” she said.

From the life she led four years ago to the life she has today, Berrios said she has learned the power of determination and confidence in one’s self.

“We can accomplish a lot if we do our best,” she said, “I feel so proud for me.”

About this column: We're exploring how a difficult economy is affecting the well-being of all of us in articles called Dispatches: The Changing American Dream.