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## Troy's Take: Bobbi Richards—Forging A Pathway For Others

By TROY CLARKSON Mar 30, 2018

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From kindergarten to 5th grade, Bobbi Richards went to five different schools. A lack of sustainable and attainable housing led to frequent moves and constant instability. As a result, she made few friends, did not sprout roots in any community, and felt no connection to any sort of a future. She was acutely aware of her poverty and recounted vividly for me when we met this week a particularly poignant moment in her childhood when, upon returning from school to a cup of hot cocoa, she began to weep, shedding tears of gratitude for a treat that she neither expected nor thought was possible.

That all changed when Bobbi's mom was approached by a friend at their church with an offer to help find a rental home. The friend also made contact with a local housing agency that provided the support and a pathway to find that home. Before long, Bobbi and her family had the roots and the stability that had eluded them her entire life. "I started feeling like education was doable," she noted to me, demonstrating through her own life experiences the critical importance of sustainable and attainable housing as a cornerstone of a stable family. With the foundation of a home in place, Bobbi's constant instabilities turned into the constant exploration of Bobbi's abilities.

Soon, she was playing Dungeons and Dragons in a gifted program at school. Soon thereafter, she and her mom were discussing a word that was previously absent in her family lexicon—college. While she initially had dreams of being a French translator, a socioeconomics course opened her eyes and her mind to a new spectrum of intellectual possibilities and became her new pursuit.

The birth of her daughter during her college years did not deter her educational pursuits. In fact, it solidified her motivation when a professor admonished her, warning that if she left school to be a mom, she'd never go back. Her own mom disagreed, explaining that she could transfer the credits she had already earned toward an associate's degree. She did and never looked back. Associate's. Bachelor's. Master's. This gifted woman also had the gift of a drive to make things better.

She then took a job as a receptionist at a local Salvation Army office where one of her responsibilities was to log and follow up on tenant complaints on a Salvation Army-owned property. Her energy, experience, and intellectual acumen were apparent, as not long thereafter, while on a much-anticipated Disney vacation with her husband and daughter, she got a call asking her to be a manager for that same Salvation Army organization. Her new boss handed her a thick Housing and Urban Development (HUD) manual and told her to read and understand it. She did.

All of those experiences informed Bobbi's commitment to the importance of both housing and education to socioeconomic stability, and her life's work and passion of providing people that same support and pathway to housing that her mom got from a church friend a generation before. Today, Bobbi is the new director of the Falmouth Housing Authority, committed to forging new pathways to success for others. She's been on the job since last September and is bringing a passion, an energy, and a sense of innovation to Falmouth's public housing agency that is sure to make a positive impact—on public housing and on our community.

She and her husband moved to Cape Cod from the San Diego area nearly five years ago, and despite the adjustment to the changing seasons, "I want us to look like the community you want to live in," she explained to me as we sat in the conference room of the Falmouth Housing Authority offices on Scranton Avenue this week, her passion for her work surpassed only by a deep and abiding commitment to transforming the public's perception of public housing.

"Just because it's subsidized housing doesn't mean it's lesser housing," she continued, noting an ambitious plan to bring bright colors and bold upgrades to the authority's units throughout Falmouth. She wants to become involved in the community and engaged with its mosaic of a population. She wants Housing Authority tenants to be plugged into their community and become an active part of it. She wants the amazing community spirit that she has already seen in the larger Falmouth community to spill over into the smaller Falmouth Housing Authority community. She wants the people she serves to become committed to service. I have no doubt that she will do all that and more.

Bobbi finished our visit with an impassioned declaration that, "just because others don't—we can!" That simple but profound phrase encapsulates the passion and the possibilities of a woman whose life was forever changed through the pathway to attainable housing, and whose life is now dedicated to forging that pathway for others.

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