

# Izayah's Story

Izayah was a bright-eyed baby, happy and hitting all the developmental milestones his mother Breann watched for. But at 18 months, Breann noticed a shift in Izayah. He became quieter, less interested in his environment. At his next checkup, the pediatrician recommended that Izayah be evaluated. He was, and Breann's concerns were validated: Izayah was eligible for early intervention services. The Unity Sunshine Program (USP) was recommended and soon Izayah began spending his days there in the care of a team of specialists.



Izayah began sessions with both a speech therapist and an occupational therapist, and within the first year, Izayah began talking and recognizing colors and shapes. Breann was delighted when, at the beginning of Izayah's second year at USP, he came home the week before Halloween and said, "I want to see the decorations!" "Decorations" was his first big word," Breann reports proudly.

This coming fall, Izayah will be entering kindergarten and a whole new world of possibility.

One thing is certain: After Izayah wears his USP cap and gown, he will move on to the next phase of his life thrust forward with the benefit of Unity Sunshine's team of specialists.

# Darren's Story



“It’s hell out there,” says Darren, a Unity House client remembering the years he was living in abandoned buildings, a sleeping bag his most significant possession. Plagued by depression and the ravages of an unsettled childhood, Darren has been on disability most of his adult life. In other communities he has found the assistance he was offered harsh and demeaning. One agency gave him a bare apartment and told him to look for furniture on the street or at the dump. He calls the food he was provided “survival moosh moosh.” He ended up in the hospital, and that’s when some long-overdue genuine help entered Darren’s life. The hospital, concerned that Darren had no home, called Unity House, and Linda Lewis, director of Housing and Support Services, went right over to the hospital.

One year later, Darren’s engaging smile is ever-present as he talks about his life. He lives in an apartment, supported by a team of Unity House professionals. His furniture is brand new, and he says it is so beautiful he finds it difficult to sit on it. When Paulette Maxon, director of Unity House’s Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP), realized he was out of food one day, she gave him money to go to a grocery store to stock up. “I was shopping at Hannaford, just like the rich people!” he says. “I offered to pay her back, but she refused.”

Early on, Unity House managed Darren’s finances for him, but today he is paying his own bills, managing his money as best he can. He echoes the concerns of so many when he says, “Now the heat bill, that’s a tragedy!”

Darren finds work when he can, sometimes helping his brother in his window business. When he isn’t working, he spends time at Unity House’s Peer Center, enjoying his ability to make the staff and other clients laugh. He met founder Mary Jane Smith there one day, and says, “I’m going to tell God to give Mary Jane a front row seat in heaven.”

# Andrea's Story

Andrea entered into a relationship with limited self-esteem, and what little she had was soon eroded by her boyfriend's daily badgering, belittling, and contempt. Nothing she did was ever good enough, and she lived in fear of doing something that would trigger a barrage of verbal abuse. Then two babies came in rapid succession, and despite her delight with them, exhaustion added another heavy weight to Andrea's life. She broke down one day at the social services department while inquiring about health insurance assistance and the kind counselor advised her to seek help at Unity House.

Andrea walked right down the corner to Unity House's Domestic Violence Program offices, and immediately felt cared for and protected. "It was the first time in a long time that I felt valued and respected," she says. Because Andrea did not believe that she was in physical danger, she continued to live at home while she marshaled the means and emotional strength to leave her partner. Within months, Andrea and her children entered Unity House's Supported Housing Program, in which she receives subsidized rent and the weekly support of a counselor while she prepares to be self-sufficient. She's in school to be a paralegal, and is hoping to find a part-time job or volunteer opportunity in a law firm to gain experience. Her parents help out with her children, and one of her girls is also in Head Start. "It's not easy being a single parent," Andrea says, "But when I return with my girls to my apartment at night, I feel peaceful and happy."



# Alfred's Story



Alfred came to Unity House just as many people do: suffering from multiple maladies. He has schizophrenia, a disease that, because it went undiagnosed for a time, also led him to a habit of medicating his confusion and anxiety with alcohol. Fortunately for Alfred, Unity House has a community residence dedicated exclusively to supporting people with both mental illness and chemical dependency. Our

Mentally Ill Chemically Addicted (MICA) residence welcomed Alfred into the program, helped him get the right medical and psychiatric care for his illness, and required him to go to twelve-step meetings to deal with his alcoholism. The MICA program provides a wide array of services, including 24/7 support and transportation to and from AA meetings. "AA kind of killed my drinking," he says with a smile. He's been in recovery now for four years, and the date he became sober is tattooed on the inside of his left arm. The tattoo helps Alfred remember that he has to take care of himself every day to stay physically and mentally healthy, and he's found it's also a reliable conversation starter.

With hard work and determination, Alfred has become virtually independent. He lives in an apartment with his fiancé, works at a steady job at the Unity House Food Panty, and manages his own banking and transportation.

Alfred likes sports and especially loves Derek Jeter and the Yankees. He was happy to take a road trip with Unity House to see the Yankees play, and even more excited that he got to experience the old Yankee Stadium before they tore it down. "That's what I love about Unity House," Alfred concludes. "They are always doing something for the clients."