



Home at last:
Natasha Vasquez
with her kids,
Foster, *left*,
and Aubree

“I SWALLOWED MY PRIDE TO **FEED MY FAMILY**”

This Colorado mom left behind a three-bedroom home with walk-in closets for her kids' sake. Today they're all smiles, but her journey to independence wasn't so easy

BY ALICE OGLETHORPE

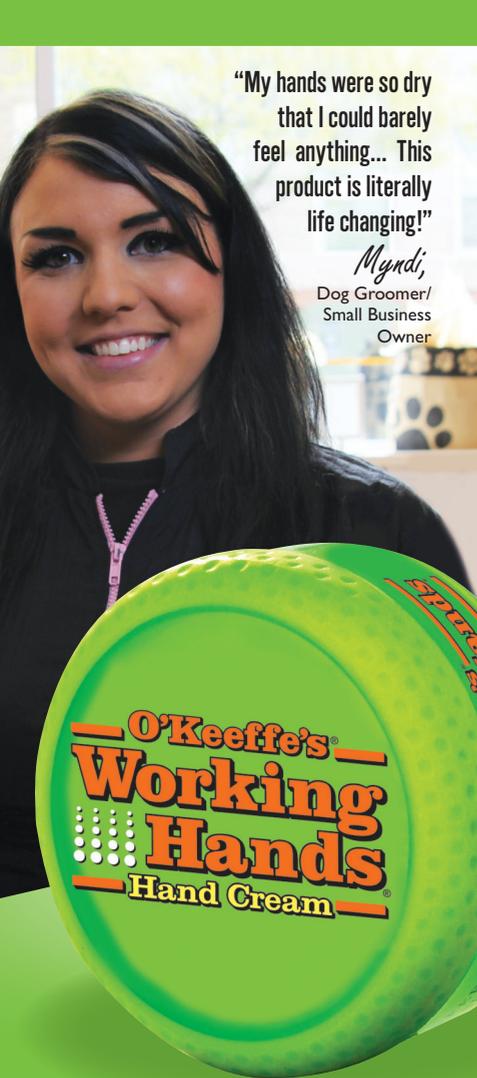
NATASHA VASQUEZ, 34, still remembers the moment in April 2011 when she said goodbye to her old life. “My husband’s anger had been escalating, and that day it came to a boiling point,” says the Denver-based mom of two. “I threw as much as I could into my car — clothes, shoes, books, some toys. I made sure my kids were safe and just started driving.”

BUT SHE HAD NOWHERE TO GO.

Fortunately, a friend offered Vasquez a basement to stay in with daughter Aubree, then 9, and son Foster, then 4. It was a single room where the three slept together in a queen-size bed. “Our stuff was crammed into one small closet, and we showered in a

“My hands were so dry that I could barely feel anything... This product is literally life changing!”

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Below: Foster and Aubree kid around



“THE ONE THING A PARENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO IS FEED HER KIDS.”

spider-filled bathroom down the hall,” she says. It was a huge downsizing from their previous home — a three-bedroom townhouse with walk-in closets.

WITH LESS THAN \$100 and no bank account or job (she’d left her last one to pursue a real estate license), Vasquez applied for unemployment and food stamps and signed her kids up for free breakfasts and lunches through No Kid Hungry (more info below). “The one thing a parent should be able to do is feed her children, and I had to admit that I couldn’t do that,” Vasquez says. “Walking in to sign up for food stamps, with my hands out and my head hung low, made me feel so ashamed.”

HER MOM AND HER CHURCH helped out, but “there were moments when I stood at the gas pump wondering if I should fill up my tank or buy bread and

milk for the week,” Vasquez says. Determined to get back on her feet, she looked for a job every day on Craigslist. After three months, she finally found one, answering phones for a toll company: “I had to stop collecting unemployment, but I was able to squirrel away enough for a deposit on an apartment.”

ALMOST A YEAR after Vasquez and her kids landed in the basement, they moved out. Life is still on the upswing: Now divorced, Vasquez has a better job and has finished interior design school and gotten that real estate license. Foster takes boxing, and Aubree is starting ballet; they’re with their dad on weekends. This summer, Vasquez took the kids to Georgia to see the beach for the first time. “This journey has been an eye-opener about what really matters,” she says. “I once could buy whatever I wanted. Now, I treasure family, loving relationships and support.”

HELP END CHILDHOOD HUNGER!

Good Housekeeping is partnering with the No Kid Hungry campaign to fight hunger among schoolchildren across the U.S. In Colorado alone, 40,000 more kids will be able to eat breakfast this year thanks to the nonprofit’s work. To find out more, go to goodhousekeeping.com/nkh.