

STORIES FROM NEIGHBORS

“I’ll show them my keys.”

After about six years in a tent, Rocky has a Durham apartment of his own – and an answer for anyone who doubts this work makes a difference.

TOLD BY ROCKY · WITH HIS CONSENT · AS TOLD TO SEAN MARIMPIETRI · JUNE 11, 2026



ROCKY AT HOME IN DURHAM, JUNE 2026 · PHOTOGRAPHED WITH HIS PERMISSION

For about six years, home was a tent. It kept the rain off, mostly, and not much else – in Rocky’s words, it “wasn’t very helpful in the extreme temperatures.” On the coldest nights, “I wouldn’t sleep at all and just shivered under the blankets,” he says. When last winter’s big snowstorm came, he rode it out in the emergency shelter. Then it was back to the tent.

“I look back on homelessness and think about how it seemed impossible to get out of homelessness,” he says. And the cold wasn’t the worst of what those years took. Asked what felt furthest out of reach – beyond shelter, beyond housing – he lands somewhere quieter: “It’s hard to make friends and keep friends when you’re homeless. You have nothing to offer in a friendship or relationship with someone, so that was missing.”

He had heard of housing programs. He assumed they were for other people. “I didn’t think they would apply to me, so I thought that it was impossible for me to get help.”



“It was a great feeling of, you know, I can now move on with the rest of my life.”

— ROCKY, ON HIS FIRST NIGHT IN HIS OWN APARTMENT



Then Sean Marimpietri, a Street Outreach Specialist in Durham, told him about a new homelessness system initiative: Housing Sprints. Rocky was “a little hesitant” at first. “But once they explained it was a new program and explained about it, I was getting excited. I had some hope that I was finally going to get out of the tent.” What worked, he says, was the organization: the “team made an extra effort to clearly explain the program and made it simpler, step by step, for me to get into it.”

After that, things moved. “As soon as I gave them my information, it was just days before we were looking for an apartment. Then I chose one, and we moved in. Things went really fast.” He chose the apartment himself – his pick, his lease, his name. And the help didn’t stop at the door: pots and pans, bed covers, towels. “Everything I needed, you know, that was really awesome, because I didn’t know where that was going to come from.”

The first night, he did the thing he’d been waiting to do: he took a shower in his own bathroom, in his own place. He won’t pretend the landing was simple. “It was really strange. It was a big adjustment because I’d been living in a tent and homeless for about six years. But it was great.”

He has been in the apartment one week – and the adjustment is already becoming a life. “I’m more relaxed now. I’m getting used to the idea of living in my apartment, so I’m hoping to get out more and meet some people in the community.” The first thing homelessness took from him – friendship – is the first thing he’s planning to rebuild.



6

YEARS ROCKY LIVED IN A TENT

15

DAYS FROM PAPERWORK TO MOVE-IN

Ask Rocky what he’d tell someone who doubts whether programs like this actually change lives, and he doesn’t reach for an argument. “I’ll show them my keys.” For the person weighing whether the work is worth funding, he keeps it just as plain: “It gets people off the streets and out of danger... It gives people a reasonable place to live.”

His advice for someone in the place he was a year ago carries the same honesty as everything else he says – hope, with the hard part left in: “I would tell them that if they have all their documents, to go ahead and get into a program like this. Otherwise, they’ll maybe be stuck out in the tent forever.”

Rocky closed the interview the way he wanted to. “It’s been a life-changing experience for me. I can’t thank them [people working in the homelessness system] enough.”



THE INVITATION

Rocky moved in because a Durham landlord said yes — and because flexible assistance covered his move-in costs and a portion of his rent. That help is what donations make possible. If you want to take part — a unit to lease, dollars to give, or volunteer time — write to hope@durhamnc.gov. The work is yours as much as anyone's.

BEHIND THIS STORY

- ◆ **Consent** — Rocky gave written consent at the outset, on June 11, 2026, the day of the interview — covering the story, his name, and his photograph. Consent is gathered once, at the top of the process. One thing stands permanently: if Rocky ever asks us to take this story down, we will.
- ◆ **The system's part** — The homelessness system consists of many agencies — across non-profit, governmental, educational, healthcare, and business sectors — that work to serve people who are experiencing homelessness. The work reflected in stories of neighbors is always the result of deep collaboration and commitment across partners.
- ◆ **The record** — “About six years” of homelessness is Rocky's own accounting, quoted as he told it. Program records confirm 15 days from paperwork to move-in. He had been housed one week as of the interview.

The photograph of Rocky was taken and is used with his permission, covered by the consent he gave at the outset.

