

Maria Perez & Family

Through hard work and determination, Maria Perez and her family overcame the major obstacles confronting them during the past several years. Maria's progress, and her life now, is in stark contrast to the life she and her family had been living.

About five years ago Maria and her husband separated. She and her two children lost their permanent home and began a series of moves to shelters and the homes of relatives. Maria was without a stable job, and the family lived without a source of steady income. Because their lives were so unsettled and the children lacked proper clothing, Maria did not send the children to school regularly. Unpaid truancy fines for unexcused absences mounted, and Maria faced the possibility of arrest.

During an interval at the Water Street Rescue Mission shelter, Maria and her family finally began receiving child support, and with the help of Tabor and Mid Penn Legal Services, she was also able to obtain Social Security income for both children. During that time, along with the distressing news that both her children had serious learning disabilities, Maria received assistance which allowed her to purchase a computer as a teaching aid. From all reports, the computer has been a great help to her son—both his verbal skills and his school grades have improved significantly.

Tabor referred Maria to Lancaster City Housing Authority's Homeless Preference Program. Maria received a Section 8 voucher, enrolled in Tabor's Lighthouse Project, and moved into a *rent with the option to buy* property owned by Tabor and managed by City Limits. Maria has maintained this house for over 15 months, sticking to her household budget and paying her rent and bills on time, first with the help of Tabor's Protective Payee program, and now on her own—she has even paid her rent ahead of time. Last year, for the first time in many years, Maria and her family celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas together in their own home. Maria cooked Thanksgiving dinner—turkey, trimmings, and all—for her children and extended family!

Maria has been a high achiever in the Tabor programs she has enrolled in, and we are continually awed and inspired by her successes. Through her enrollment in the Family Savings Account program, Maria opened a TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) account for her son. She plans to re-enroll in the FSA program [now **Matched Savings Accounts**] to begin saving for the purchase of her own home—quite possibly the house the family is currently living in. She has always been several hundred dollars ahead in her savings account and even managed to save enough to purchase a car for her father.

During her enrollment in Tabor's Consumer Credit Counseling program Maria paid off past due parking tickets and utility bills as well as fines incurred when her children missed school. Maria now has clean credit and has paid off a total of \$7,200 in debt to 31 accounts.

In January of 2003, having progressed well beyond her goals, Maria graduated from Tabor's Shelter to Independent Living Program with honors. She recently enrolled in Tabor's Family Self Sufficiency program and has developed a new goal to continue to move forward to home ownership and self-sufficiency.