

## NeighborWorks Great Falls Creates a Successful Homebuyer



Meet Erika Graves, the first homeowner to use the Section 8 to HomeOwnership Program operated by NeighborWorks Great Falls and Great Falls Housing Authority. Erica started the program in August of 2010 and thought she would be picking out her new home in October. But, she soon realized that it was going to take a little work and commitment on her part to become a homeowner. Erika attended Homebuyer Education and with a NWGF homeownership planner several times, to assess her readiness for homeownership and the steps she needed to achieve her goal.

Erika was one of three participants to complete the Section 8 program. She began the program with a strong understanding of her goal “to become a homeowner”. She was in the process of paying down outstanding debt to improve her credit rating. She also learned the value of changing spending habits, so Erika worked with her family to save money, such as changing their weekly family outing to McDonald’s to a once a month activity. Her daughter asked if they “cut out McDonald’s until they purchased a house, could they get a dog?” She also changed her route to work in order to avoid to being tempted to purchase a daily latte.

Erika saved \$1,000 in the Individual Development Account Program, which will be matched 5:1 with funding from the Federal Assets for Independence Program and the Northwest Area Foundation. The IDA instills a savings habit and helps to build a relationship with a deposit institution. Erika told her Section 8 to HomeOwnership group that it “wasn’t difficult to save because she had good reason -- she had a goal to be a homeowner.” Erika said that before the IDA program, she often would spend any money that she had available after paying her bills, living paycheck to paycheck, but the IDA program made her feel better about her ability to save. She mentioned that “she will be working to save another \$1,000 to buy something for the new home”

When NeighborWorks homes renovated under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program became available in early 2011, Erika followed her dream to work, qualifying for a first mortgage with her bank and selecting a home would suit her family for the homes available. She also noted her second and third choices of homes. Erika was awarded her first choice in an NSP home since that home best suited her family’s needs.

Congratulations, Erika! We’re very proud of you!

A video of Erika's reaction to being selected as a NSP homebuyer and her further joy at finding she can purchase her first choice can be viewed at:  
<http://nwgreatfalls.org/successful.html>

NeighborWorks Great Falls thanks the Great Falls Housing Authority, NeighborWorks America, the City of Great Falls, the Montana Department of Commerce, the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Kellogg Foundation, Assets for Independence and Rural Dynamics, Inc for their support of the programs that helped Erika purchase a home.