

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: *Christina Fisher, 19*

Teen learns key life skills in move toward independence

By JODIE WAGNER
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At age 19, Christina Fisher is alone for the first time.

Eight months ago, the Palm Beach Community College sophomore moved out of her grandmother's house in Riviera Beach and into a duplex at the Villages of Hope complex in Lake Park.

The move was a scary one for Fisher, but also an empowering one.

Through Villages of Hope, a faith-based transitional living community for young adults that provides essential life skills development, she has become self-sufficient and focused.

"When I moved in here, I felt great because it was mine," said Fisher, who was raised by her grandmother and her maternal aunt from infancy.

"I got this sense of independence, of just depending on myself, where I can be myself and just have my own stuff and my own things," she said. "It felt great to just move in and get my own place, so to speak. It's a nice feeling, especially at 19 years old."

Like many Villages of Hope residents, Fisher lacked a typical upbringing.

Though her home environment was stable, she rarely saw her mother, who has struggled with substance abuse, or her father, who has been in and out of her life.

After turning 18 last year and graduating from Dwyer High School, Fisher decided to take her first steps toward independence.

Eventually, she landed at Villages of Hope, which strives to provide a supportive and proactive living and learning environment for foster youths and other



ELIZA GUTIERREZ/Staff Photographer

At her new home in Villages of Hope, a faith-based transitional living community for young adults in Lake Park, Christina Fisher is branching out on her own after moving out of her grandmother's house this year.

homeless youths in need.

"I just want to be able to work my way up in the world," said Fisher, who shares her duplex with a roommate. "That's what I love about living here."

Fisher also has a part-time job obtained through Villages of Hope. She is a clerk at the Florida Department of Children and Families, and her duties include helping applicants submit information on computers, taking phone calls and scanning applications for benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid and other state programs.

"I love it," she said of her job. "I just love helping people. If I can do something and they can't, then I'm just happy to lend my assistance."

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Q&A

What are your hobbies?

Reading, hanging out with friends, swimming and spending time with her family.

Who is your hero or someone who has inspired you?

Her maternal aunt, Julie Floyd. 'She raised me into the young woman I am today.'

What is the best advice you've been given?

'Stay on the right track.'

What is your favorite junk food?

'Anything that's sour. I'm not into sweets.'

What is one thing people don't know about you that would surprise them?

'I'm really sensitive. I cry at the drop of a hat.'

What do you do to get away from it all?

'Sit in my room, close the door and listen to music.'