

Introduction

Hello, my name is Chere Lynn Ruiz. I am an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. I grew up in Fort Yates ND. I spent many years of my childhood in foster care and my youth years in juvenile jails in various states. I am married with 10 children and one on the way.

Homeless Experience

I've also been homeless during my youth and adult years. During my youth years, I was homeless with my adopted mom and emotionally and physically abused by my adopted mom who was from Standing Rock. During my adult years, I experienced homelessness when I lived in Ft. Yates housing. I had lived in that house for 9 years before being evicted for abandonment.

Reason for Homelessness

The reason I lost my home in Ft Yates due to abandonment was because I was in jail for 6 months in tribal jail due to not sending my oldest child to school.

What has happened from this experience?

So, I moved to Bismarck in 2015 experiencing homelessness until 2019 literally on the street. I would sleep under corn fields, pine trees, bridges, abandoned trailers, apartment stairways because I didn't know anyone in the Bismarck area. In 2016, I ended up stealing a car so I can be warm, it was too cold outside, and I ended up in prison for the first time.

In 2017 when I got out of prison, I started using drugs and heavily. Then I met my future husband in 2019 in Bismarck. We got married in 2021. He was the one who got us an apartment to live together with our two children for about 7 months until the landlord forced us to vacate the unit to avoid eviction due to a housing violation—my son was lighting fireworks in Bismarck which is illegal. Then, we began living in hotels in Bismarck, then CPS took our kids away. This is when we gave up and started using drugs and alcohol which eventually led to being on the run from law enforcement. This led me back into prison in 2021. In 2023, I was back out and reunited with my husband after staying in the halfway house for 14 months after being released from prison.

What has helped me?

In May 2023, I began coming to NATIVE, Inc. through the FTR program and began attending their cultural and traditional healing programs. NATIVE, Inc. provides classes that taught me how to make ribbon skirts, ribbon shirts, beaded earrings, star quilts, hand drums and then I participated in talking circles, drum nights and sweat lodge ceremonies. It helped me because I felt like I was a part of something positive, and specific to belonging to our Native culture and people. This made me feel free to be myself and to experience something that I've always longed for—a sense of belonging and connected to who I really am. This helped me build confidence, motivation and the belief that I can advocate for myself to get the help that I need so I can have a better life for myself and my whole family. I am still married, and we are expecting a baby in March. We have been able to keep our apartment for the last year because we have chosen to stay sober together.

Although we are walking on the red road this means remaining sober, we still have obstacles with housing. Our current landlord wants us to move out in June because we need to move into a place that

can accommodate our family size of 9 at this time. We need more affordable housing for large families and recovering felons.

The last thing I want to say is that “Even this helps me to heal, sharing my story with leaders who can make a difference.”