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Changing Lives

Inner City Law Center's Homeless Prevention Project provides legal, rental and case management assistance to people who are at risk of homelessness due to an unexpected financial hardship. Thanks to your support, last year we kept over 800 people in their homes.

Sylvia Wilson, a longtime resident of Los Angeles, is one example of a client who was at risk of homelessness due to unforeseen circumstances. Ms. Wilson is a dedicated single-parent who has worked as a legal assistant in several prominent Los Angeles law firms. She has made a comfortable life for herself and her child, renting a lovely Westside apartment and preparing her teenage son to enter college at USC. However, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer her life quickly changed. Almost immediately she began a series of arduous and intense cancer treatments that included over 30 radiation and chemotherapy treatment sessions. This painful and exhausting process left Ms. Wilson physically and mentally debilitated. Returning to work was no longer an option; she had no choice but to apply for state disability benefits.

Ms. Wilson applied for state disability benefits which were not granted until over two months after she had applied. This interruption in income caused her to fall one month behind in her rent. One month behind was too much for her landlord, who filed an eviction lawsuit with a trial date set for three days before Christmas. Facing the risk of homelessness for her and her son on Christmas, Ms. Wilson scrambled to find resources and contacted our Homeless Prevention Project. ICLC's Director of Homelessness Prevention, Javier Beltran, worked to resolve the eviction action. However the landlord's attorney refused to settle the case unless he received \$800 in attorney fees. Because Federal regulations do not allow ICLC to use federal rental assistance money to pay attorney's fees, Javier realized that he would not be able to keep Ms. Wilson in her unit and tried to get her more time to move out.

However, on the day of Ms. Wilson's eviction trial the landlord's attorney remained callously uncooperative and insisted that Ms. Wilson pay his costs. At this point, Javier decided to fight the eviction. He told opposing counsel that he was ready to go to trial, while at the same time suggesting that Ms. Wilson would be eligible for rental assistance and could possibly pay some costs if she could stay in her unit.

Concerned about the additional costs of trial, the landlord relented and settled the case to allow her to stay. As a result, Ms. Wilson and her son have kept their home and although she continues her fight with cancer, she no longer worries about becoming homeless.