

# Building Brighter Futures in Milwaukee

By Angie Mason, Milwaukee Christian Center

*"I am what success looks like."* It wasn't until this year that Jasmine, a 22-year-old young woman from Milwaukee, could repeat this mantra with confidence.

Nine months ago, Jasmine visited the Milwaukee Christian Center's (MCC) food pantry to help a friend who was in need of food and diapers. While there, she came upon the opportunity to join MCC's YouthBuild, a program in Milwaukee that empowers young adults, ages 18-24, to overcome challenges and move towards family-sustaining careers through education and hands-on construction training while building affordable homes for low-income families.



"Since I was 13 years old, I have been one of the sole providers in my family. I'm a lover of language—a writer—but high school was never easy for me. I haven't had a lot of structure in my life, and while I've been in lots of programs to get my high school diploma, it wasn't until YouthBuild that I felt I could do it. Here, I've been surrounded by genuinely caring people who want me to succeed," Jasmine shares. "Math has always been my biggest obstacle. My YouthBuild teachers helped me sharpen my skills and made me feel more confident. They showed me my improvement and helped me face my fear."

YouthBuild has also provided Jasmine an opportunity to learn construction skills while building affordable, single-family homes in the neighborhood. "I can't tell you what it feels like to build a garage from the ground up and to know that I was a part of it," Jasmine confesses. "Just the other day, when we were working on a roof, I climbed a ladder to the top and asked a friend to take a photo of me up there. It seems silly, but I wanted proof, something to hold on to, to remind myself that *I am what success looks like.*"

This May, Jasmine completed her GED and received her high school diploma at the Milwaukee Area Technical College's graduation ceremony. Earlier in the year, she attended a National Association of Women in Contracting workshop and made a connection with OPCMIA Local 599—a plasterer's and cement masons association. They took an interest in her and are planning to meet with her in the near future to explore potential apprenticeship opportunities.

Jasmine has been a great asset to YouthBuild this year and has come incredibly far. This was illustrated by a recent YouthBuild service project she completed for a homeless shelter in Milwaukee. The shelter needed higher tables in their kitchen that could accommodate storage carts underneath. Jasmine helped redesign and deliver the tables. It wasn't until she was at the shelter that she remembered staying there as a child. "Through YouthBuild, I have been able to give back to where I came from," she says proudly.

"I still have my ups and downs," Jasmine admits, "but YouthBuild has helped me feel like I belong somewhere. For the first time in my life, I can look in the mirror and say with confidence, 'I am what success looks like.'"

*YouthBuild is a program of the Milwaukee Christian Center, which is a multi-service organization that works to build strong neighborhoods full of opportunity. It approaches that work through four core areas: housing, youth development, older adults, and food security—serving over 7,500 people each year. What began with American Baptist roots providing outreach to immigrants on Milwaukee's south side in 1921, MCC now serves youth, families, and older adults of all races, ethnicities, and ages throughout Milwaukee County. Learn more at [www.mccwi.org](http://www.mccwi.org).*