

## **Building the foundation for her own bright future**

Talk about coming full circle.

In the spring of 2018, when she was just 23, Vanessa Mingo took part in Marion County's 7<sup>th</sup> Phoenix Rising YouthBuild. She was one of only two women among the 13 members in the alternative education program designed to raise hopes as well as raising walls.

In partnership with Habitat for Humanity, Phoenix Rising YouthBuild strives to revitalize economically challenged neighborhoods while making a positive difference in the lives of young adults, ages 18-24.

At the time, the mother of two told the *Star-Banner*, "After I saw the family at the wall raising, I made myself try hard and not give up."

She did more than try. She succeeded.

On Wednesday, Mingo accepted the keys to her own home, standing in her new living room, surrounded by Habitat for Humanity staff, family, friends and community partners including CareerSource CLM and its youth services provider Eckerd Connects Workforce Development.

While it may not have been built by a Phoenix Rising team, the place that Mingo and her children Peter and Savannah now call home is the same design as the one she helped build seven years ago.

Beau Williams, who was Vanessa's Success Mentor back then, hit the nail on the head in celebrating her achievement.

"I was so proud of her then, and when I found out that she was getting a home it was just like full circle," Williams said during the key-passing ceremony. "I'm so, so proud of you, and you're my kid. You'll always be my kid. I just can't believe this day is here for you ... The dedication you showed seven years ago is paying off today because you are just as dedicated, strong, and sassy."

Heaven Colon, program manager for Eckerd Connects, served as the lead workforce career coach when Vanessa joined the Phoenix Rising program.

"We go way, way back ... And you always said, 'I'm going to have my own home, I'm going to build my home,' Colon recalled. "You did everything and you are here today ... It's an honor to see this moment."

In the Habitat for Humanity program for the House Blessing, Vanessa is described as a “devoted and energetic mother, known for her big heart, love of animals and passion for lifting others up.”

Her journey with Habitat began nearly two years ago. In addition to paying for the home, Vanessa also completed 400 hours of sweat equity hours to earn the right to do so.

Among the many on Vanessa’s thank you list was her own “beautiful mother.”

“She’s the reason why I’m who I am today,” Vanessa said. “She always taught me how to save money for a rainy day, always make sure you know your house in an order, and so I know that I will take good care of this house.”