

### **“As I walk beside You”**

One of the most powerful stories in my journey as a Community Health Worker is about a father and his two young daughters who were new to Maine. When they first arrived in Maine, every shelter was already full. There wasn't a single place ready to welcome them. With nowhere else to go, they were forced to sleep in the streets, in parks, and sometimes even in someone's car. Their situation was heartbreaking, far beyond words.

They were referred to me by a local Oncology Department after the father was diagnosed with cancer. From our first conversation, I could tell they were highly vulnerable. Through **active listening**, I learned about their multiple challenges, which included homelessness, lack of food, limited transportation, and urgent medical needs. At first, they were quiet and exhausted, but as I shared part of my own story and experiences, they began to open up and trust me.

In moments like these, my role as a CHW goes far beyond healthcare. It's about **walking beside people when they feel completely abandoned**. I could have simply referred them to a service, handed them an address, and walked away. But I knew that wouldn't be enough. So I decided to accompany them everywhere, appointment after appointment, office to office, walking with them in search of a solution.

The first priority was to find shelter, as the doctor emphasized that securing stable housing was essential before beginning cancer treatment. I tirelessly advocated for them, reaching out to partners and local agencies, but housing options were scarce.

One day, the father told me something I will never forget: “Since I arrived in the United States, this is the first time I feel treated like a human being.” He had endured detention, fear, and mistreatment. For him, being heard and respected meant more than anything else. That moment reminded me that **health is not only about medicine, it is about dignity**.

Later, during the **Maine Community Health Worker Summit**, I was invited to share a story that demonstrated the impact of our work. I spoke about this father, alone, battling cancer, caring for two young daughters, and sleeping in the cold with no roof over their heads. I passionately advocated on his behalf, asking the audience for help- not for myself, but for this family who desperately needed a home.

Through that advocacy, doors finally began to open. With the help of fellow CHWs and community partners, we secured housing. It was a turning point. With a safe and stable home, the father could finally focus on his health. He began his cancer treatment, and little by little, his condition improved. His daughters were able to return to school and regain a sense of normalcy.

Today, when I see him, I can hardly recognize the man who once slept in the park with his children. He has gained weight, regained strength, and most importantly, he smiles again. Though he has not fully recovered, he now volunteers regularly, giving back to the same community that once seemed to have forgotten him.

Every time we meet, I feel proud, not only of him but of what it means to truly walk alongside someone during their most challenging moments.

As I often say, *being a Community Health Worker is not just about connecting people to care; it's about restoring their hope, dignity, and belief that they matter.*

#### **Amevi's Story**