

Man with failing vision needs help



Larry Dasher is recently blind and is in dire need of clothing, food stamps and transportation for his rehabilitation. He lives in Homestead. Here, his granddaughter Aquadondria McLeod, 15, visits him at his home.

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Larry Dasher loved to be outdoors. To earn a living, he worked in landscaping. For pleasure, he was an avid fisherman.

But for the past year, cataracts have developed in his eyes from diabetes, causing Dasher to gradually lose his vision. As a result, he is now afraid to leave the small, rundown Homestead apartment that he calls his "little hut."

"I can't do the things I used to do," Dasher said. "Unless somebody is with me, I can't get around. I went to the mall the other day and I was scared."

Dasher has lost vision in his right eye and has extremely low vision in his left eye from a condition called diabetic retinopathy. Eventually, doctors say, he will have no sight at all.

Adjusting has been difficult for Dasher, 55, who lives alone.

"I was lost and I didn't know what to do or who to turn to," he said.

For the past four months, the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been helping Dasher cope. He is picked up by Special Transportation Services three times a week.

"They're teaching me how to do things in the kitchen, to read Braille, and how to get around on the street on my own," Dasher said.

Still getting used to his blindness, Dasher recounts how he almost got run over a couple of weeks ago but applied what he had learned from the Lighthouse.

“The bus came late and it was dark. I realized I was in the middle of the road because I didn't feel a sidewalk. I had to feel for the grass. The teachers are always telling us to stay near the grass.”

Dasher, who relies on Medicaid for his medical bills, receives \$637 a month in Social Security benefits. After paying his monthly rent of \$575, he can't finish paying his light bill of \$96. And his phone service was suspended recently.

With the help of neighbor Shaira Nita McLeod and her three children, whom he has known for eight months, Dasher is fed and looked after. “He's adopted me as his daughter and I've taken on the responsibility to help him,” McLeod said.

“I help him out all the time, whatever it is. After his little check is gone by the first of the month, he has no money for the rest of the month,” she said. “That's a lot of time to go without any money.”

But McLeod can only help him in the evenings because she works as an account manager during the day. Her children help him when they're not attending school.

Dasher is in need of monetary donations so he can improve his quality of life. He would like to move into a nursing home for the blind, where he will be able to be constantly under someone's supervision.

“He definitely is in a bad situation all by himself, and in need of housing assistance,” said Therese Belizaire, a social service manager at Miami Lighthouse.

For now, Dasher said the Lighthouse is the best option he has.

“I just keep going to this program and try to learn as much as I can,” he said.

“I need to learn now before my vision gets even worse,” he said.